Mr. Petre

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MR. PETRE

The Great Specialist wrote :—"Special circumstances : A Bastard." (Page 224).

Frontispiece.]

MR. PETRE

A Novel

BY

HILAIRE BELLOC

WITH TWENTY-TWO DRAWINGS

BY

G. K. CHESTERTON

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Dedication

To All Poor Gentlemen

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ILLUSTRATIONS

The Great Specialist wrote :—"Special circumstances : A Bastard" (page 224)	*Frontispiece*
	Facing page
Mr. Petre wondering who or what he may have been .	14
". . . . As though he were a Unicorn"	18
". . . . And the two ex-Lord-Chancellors agreed" .	37
Mrs. Cyril leaping to the telephone	47
His Grace the Proprietor of the "Messenger" conferring the Order of the Boot on Mr. Batterby, of Golders Green in the County of Middlesex	63
Sir Jeremiah Walton, God's servant	70
Minatory but Patient Admonishment of the Ignoble Algernon by Breeches of Bolter's Club, St. James' (S.W.1)	74
". . . Spectacles adorning a face like the full moon" .	82
"His forehead witnessed to a lifetime of profound thought, his white beard to careful grooming"	84
The Partners	103
"Exactly. I quite understand"	115
Dada Beeston (Dorothea Madua, second and younger daughter of Henry, 10th Baron Beeston, of Beeston Abbey, Beeston, Rutlandshire ; and of Desirée Waldschwein, his wife)	151
"One had chosen Public Service, the other—Affairs" .	158
"He used to think in three figures ; he was now thinking in five"	164

ILLUSTRATIONS

Facing page

Young Mr. Cassleton, growing acquainted with the World of Affairs 171

The Public discovering no small appetite for the Debentures at 8% 194

"He had decided" 213

The second and more jovial Great Specialist, Sir William Bland 234

Joyous recognition of Buffy Thomas 244

John Kosciusko protesting against the interference of Peers in Judicial Procedure 300

Ermyntrude, First (and Last) Viscountess Boole: Lord Chancellor of England 303

MR. PETRE

CHAPTER I

It was the 3rd of April, 1953. As the big rotor came up through the Sound at the end of her ten days' passage from New York, a passenger standing alone forward upon her decks looked at the very shores of Devon close at hand on either side, and delighted in the Spring.

It was nearly two years since he had seen his own country, and he felt the eagerness of his return almost as though he were a boy again. He was a short, rather stout man in later middle age, with grey curling hair, clean shaven and in his gesture and expression most unmistakably English. His clothes and his boots were American, and his hat; and what was more, when he spoke there was just that trace of American accent and that habitual use of American locutions which so often marks the man who has lived, though for no more than a few months, in wholly American surroundings.

Everything was ready for his landing. He would

not be troubled with so much as a handbag. The blessed abolition of passports in 1933 as for Englishmen landing in England saved him the trouble of even that small encumbrance; and as he hated his pockets bulging with papers, he had locked all, down to the least important notes, in a little dispatch box and handed it to his steward. He had nothing on him but one of the tickets under the new system, the ordinary railway ticket for London which they exchange on board against the steamship receipt; and a good wad of £63 in English notes, with a handful of change; he had not even kept a nickel for remembrance. He could recover what he required by the time he had taken his seat in the train; and all this disembarrassment, coupled with the long vacuity of the sea voyage, gave him an odd sense of freedom.

Odd . . . and he knew that it was odd. It was a little too complete. His mind seemed to be holding nothing but the scene before him: the vigorous sky, the leaping water and the green above the grey of the rocks with their white fringe of foam.

He felt unnaturally careless. And when his thoughts turned to his luggage and its arrangement, to the petty incidents of that same morning, they

were blurred and faded. Nor did he concern himself with their increasing faintness . . . he enjoyed relief in it. But he knew that the relief was strange.

His daily life in America had been too much preoccupied, and that for a long time past. He had gone over to judge and help direct an investment in land, which had not turned out too brilliantly. He had not even been able to sell out as he wished ; he was still held to it and its mortgage. He had not put things right. He had found it of no purpose to remain. He had turned back homewards—and yet he suffered an uneasy fear that in his absence things might go worse. Too much of his small fortune had been locked up in that venture, and the prospect before him, when he should reach his rooms in London, was not over bright. He was not sure that he could keep up the modest scale of living on which he had arranged his life for the last ten years before this voyage to the States. The place he had inherited in Dorsetshire, and which had been at his disposal since his mother's death fifteen years earlier, he had let ; but there were heavy charges upon it, and he could see little income in what remained of its revenue.

Nevertheless, he did now feel that curious

sense of lightness and of carelessness. It was not connected with the returning home: it seemed a new mood of a kind by itself. It came in deep successive waves, each washing out, while it lasted, all responsibility and care; and twice, as they neared the breakwater, he went through an abnormal moment or two of complete freedom, like that of a man who has just wakened from a profound sleep, and has not yet remembered the burdens and details of life.

* * * * *

When he had landed with the other passengers that unknown mood returned upon him with greatly increased force and with more permanence. It enveloped him like a mist. It made him neglectful of all appointment and watch. He forgot his steward altogether; and his luggage, as though it had never been. He found himself doing only that which he could do without any effort of recollection. His empty-handedness, his neglect, made him the first to walk up the platform along the train for London. He took no heed of the reserved places. He chose out an empty seat in a first-class carriage at the head of the train and took a corner looking forward. There he sat in the same continued mood of content and vacuity.

The train filled, and the crush of porters hurrying and crossing each other upon the platform made confusion all along its line. One in particular, badly chivied by an anxious steward, who had implored leave to land in search of a missing client, was asking what he should do. That porter had put a dispatch box, a rug and a small strapped packet upon a reserved place. He had noted the name. But no one had come to claim them. The porter and the steward, looking back to where a couple of belated men were running, saw no sign of the expected figure. The glorious official to whom a clamorous appeal was made refused to delay the train. The whistle sounded, the rotor buzzed, the train drew out. The porter and the steward felt each in his own degree that agony of loss which greater men know when they open their paper of a morning and read of a slump. The one was widowed of a sovereign. The other of half a crown.

Meanwhile the author of their misfortunes sat all alone in his comfortable carriage, looking at the houses slipping by and the beginning of the country-side. Then he grew drowsy and sank into his corner and fell asleep. He half awoke at a hand tapping upon his shoulder and a voice asking him for his ticket. He had it upon him; he felt for it, found

it in an inside pocket and handed it over, and in a moment was asleep again.

When he woke it was but slowly, for evidently he had been more fatigued than he knew, and the strain of a rough voyage had weighed upon him. The express was already roaring past Newbury Race-course.

He recognised the place and suddenly connected it in his mind with a name . . . the name of someone living thereabouts. . . . Yes, . . . it was certainly someone connected with those trees and heaths beyond . . . but what was the name? He sought and sought, and nothing would come. It was very aggravating, this little lapse. He remembered how often of late he had had slight trouble of that kind. Then he set out to try and recover the name by a chain. He had passed a race-course. He knew it of old. He would connect things up link by link. First he looked at his watch. It was just at 12.30. He had started from . . . Where had he started from?

That really *was* exasperating. . . . that was even serious.

He shook his head with the sharp gesture a man makes when he is trying to be rid of some passing nervous affection, and he did what the efficiency

Mr. Petre wondering who or what he may have been.

men call "concentrating." But his concentration was poor. Not a word would come.

Then overwhelmingly, in a flash, the truth broke upon him. He had lost all conception of his past: every image of it. He knew where he was. All about him, the landscape, the type of railway carriage—everything was familiar, but of any name or place or action or movement *in connection with himself* prior to that sleep nothing whatsoever remained.

He passed his hand across his forehead, and stared at the empty cushions opposite him, waiting for this very unpleasant mental gap to close up, and for his normal self to return. It did not return. What was worse, he felt a sort of certitude within him that it had gone for ever—that it was no good looking for it. It was as though he had died.

Through all the remaining hour of the run into Paddington he was seeking, seeking, seeking. The Thames, distant Windsor, Slough went past, the first houses of London: he knew them all as well as he knew his own voice; but of any link between these and himself, of any action or emotion of his past identity, there was no trace at all. It was not even blank. It was nothingness.

The train drew up, the herd of passengers bundled

out, and he, at the head of the train, among the first. He went uncertainly sauntering down the platform. He was half inclined to ask someone where the train had come from. He even found himself listening to one or two groups of people in the hope that he should hear its name; but he was ashamed to listen too long, and still more ashamed to put the question which had at first occurred to him. It was a pity. If he had acted there and then he would have saved himself a great deal of coming trouble. But he had already begun to feel a mixture of shame and fear lest his humiliation should be discovered. That dangerous mood was to grow.

Mechanically he hailed one of the new rotor taxis—he recognised them, though he could not tell where or how (they had just been coming in the year before he left England; but of that year there was nothing now in his mind). It suddenly broke upon him that he could not tell the taxi where to drive.

Now the man who drove the taxi judged tips by wealth and wealth by external signs. So he said, with simple judgment, "The Splendide?"

His fare nodded hastily and got in. Anywhere would do. Here again the name was perfectly

familiar to him. The picture of the big hotel in his mind was quite clear. He could have told you exactly where it was in London. But for the soul of him he couldn't have told you *how* he knew. He nodded, and the rotor cab jerked and plunged and pulled up sharp and jerked forward again for its half-hour to the Splendide, with the stricken man inside concentrating away for dear life and getting nowhere.

During the Berkeley Street block, and to the whirring of the mighty little engine and the shaking of the cab, he suddenly shouted PETRE at the top of his voice. The driver opened the door sharply and barked at him, "What say?"

"Nothing," said the greatly relieved man, sighing deeply. "I was talking to myself."

The taxi driver slammed the door, looked at the policeman whose hand still barred the traffic, jerked his thumb towards the inside of his cab, touched his forehead and smiled. The policeman also deigned to smile. Then the flood was released and they jerked off again.

Petre, that was it . . . Petre. . . . That was his name! But what Petre? He could not tell. The sound was perfectly clear and perfectly familiar. . . . Petre. Petre it was: he was

quite certain of that.—Thank God, he was certain of that! . . . And during the next three blocks in the traffic his certitude grew firmer and firmer. He clung to the protection of that word Petre as does a drowning man to a deck chair. That was something to go on, anyhow. . . . He could not see it as P-e-t-e r or P-e-t-r-e. It was only the sound he was sure of. But when he came to think of it, it must be Petre, for he had not in his mind any savour, not even the slightest, of a grotesque connotation, and if it had been "Peter," however familiar to him, it would have sounded a little silly in his ears. . . . No, it must certainly be Petre. It was a good name. . . . There was—he had a vague idea—a Lord Petre. He did not think he was—or had been—a lord. He would have remembered that at least, though all the rest had gone. No, it was Mr. Petre all right. . . . Mr. something Petre, as Mr. J. Petre. . . . But what was that Christian name, or those Christian names?

He had reached the Splendide. Mr. Petre (for he could now securely call himself by his right name, an anchor-hold in such an awful tide) got out and vastly overpaid the cab. The new rotor cabs had the fare marked up in large red ticking figures

". . . As though he were a Unicorn."

inside. It was a rule brought in by Jessie Anderson when she was at the Home Office in the last Administration. It had always annoyed her to peer through the glass, and she was no longer young. Mr. Petre quite understood the meaning of those figures; shillings and pence were familiar to him and the connection of their symbols with the coins in his hand was part of himself, though he could not have told you where or when he had last handled such coins.

Now and then he would hesitate over a detail. He had puzzled a minute before getting the name of Oxford Street as they crossed it. But the run of London life was as common to him as to any of the myriads around. It was only the bond between them and his past self that had snapped.

He knew the Splendide. He knew the ritual of registration. He even knew the liveries with their absurd gold crowns. He knew it was strange to take a room without luggage. He feared resentment. Yet he rightly judged such eccentricity stood a better chance at the more expensive hotels than the less.

He was full of the ordeal before him, and he approached it rather nervously. But he put on as bold a front as he could, and gave the name

"Petre" in rather a loud voice, and with that slight American intonation which was his though he knew it not.

He was surprised at a certain note in the clerk's reply, something between the tone in which a man addresses a great lady advanced in years and that in which he would address (were addresses paid to such things) a unicorn or any other apparition; and the voice using these tones said quite low, so that no one around should hear, and with a certain thrill of reverence displayed and of astonishment controlled:

"Mr. John K. Petre?"

Mr. Petre nodded rapidly. It was no good seeking for the real Christian names: these would do as well as any other for the time being.

He was relieved to see the right spelling coming out from the tip of the clerk's pen in the register: "John K. Petre." No place of residence followed. The clerk knew too much for that. He made an inclination that was nearly a bow as he sent for the boy in buttons, and begged Mr. Petre in a still lower voice to let him know if the suite he had chosen would do: it had only three rooms, he said, but it was the best unoccupied and over the garden. 200 dollars—forty pounds.

Mr. Petre recollected the £63 he had upon him and the very strange condition under which he was attacking this stronghold. He firmly refused anything but a plain bedroom and bathroom. He would not even have a sitting-room, and the clerk this time really did bow, as a worshipper might incline to a saint who was beyond the pale of mortal kind. He whispered rather than spoke the number "44," and Mr. Petre, before going to the lift, said:

"One moment, I have no luggage." He said it in the over-emphatic tone which men use to say anything startling that has to be forced down; he repeated it in that same firm voice in which the slight American accent was emphasised: "I have no luggage."

The clerk showed no surprise at all. If Mr. John K. Petre chose to travel without luggage, it seemed to be in the clerk's eyes but one more evidence of more than human greatness.

"I shall go out and buy what I need," continued Mr. Petre, still firmly, "when I have washed, in a few minutes."

"Can we ——" insinuated the clerk.

"No," said Mr. Petre yet more firmly, and almost readily. "I always do these things myself."

But when and where he had done these things himself he could not possibly have told, for Mr. Petre had no idea what things he did and what things he did not do. His new life had begun less than a couple of hours before, and the old one was lost.

He followed the boy to the lift, and as he went he was reassured. For he said to himself, "I am someone of consequence. I am known." But on that thought followed its terrifying successors—The more imperative his need for caution (the lift was taking him up to No. 44); the worse the ridicule if his secret were discovered before he had found himself (the lift had reached the landing); the deeper his humiliation and (the door of 44 was opened for him—no, he needed nothing; it shut upon him and he was seated alone in despair) the more intolerable his lot. What if that unknown life of his had been passed in some great household, a grandeur of spouse and children and domestics; lived for years with intimates who should know what had befallen him? He would be marked. A diminished man. One who had "had an accident." Pitied, despised, his relapse awaited. He recoiled at the thought! . . .

No! There must be no discovery by others.

With infinite caution, catching and comparing every word, he would pick up piece by piece the truth about himself. He would secretly effect his own restoration. But what of questions? How should he answer *them?*

* * * * *

While Mr. Petre was moving towards the lift, magnificently waved forward by dazzling liveries and piloted in procession by the boy in buttons, a young fellow who had been sitting in the lounge of the hotel talking to an older man got up and sauntered towards the registration counter.

He had heard a name—and that name was gold. For though the clerk had whispered Mr. Petre had spoken loudly and without discretion.

The young man dug his hands into his trouser pockets, looked for a moment through the windows toward the street, and then turned sharply beyond the register book to the office where inquiries were made. As he did so he kept his head well to the left, outwards from the counter; but his eyes shot furtively to the right, and he spotted the name upon the open page. It was John K. Petre all right. He had thought as much.

At the Inquiry he asked whether there was a

telegram for Gadget, and was not surprised to hear that there was none; indeed, he had only that moment made up the name. But such is the spell of association over even the sharpest crook, that he could not help saying, "John K. Gadget"; so much was the famous name of John K. Petre now branded upon his brain.

He sauntered back again to his chair, sank down, and took up speech again with his companion.

The young man himself was tall, just an inch or two overdressed, with black hair, greased, brushed back over a high narrow forehead and thin face, of the bony sort, which is also called "distinguished," the long narrow chin and the high narrow forehead were each a long way from the advanced cape of the squeezed nose. He made delicate gestures with his right hand. He spoke leisurely and high.

His companion was of no such exalted station. He was squat, round-headed, double-chinned, with a thick, frowsy, grey moustache; short, ill-combed hair; and dressed in clothes so loose and creased that they disgraced that cavern of the rich. His boots were shameful, and even his collar was dubious.

"Well, Arthur?" said he to the young man.

"Well, Batterby, he 's come here."

"Oh, he has, has he? I told you so!" said Batterby, not without pride.

"Yep," answered the more elegant Arthur. "There 's the name right enough. John K. Petre. But you know what I told you. He makes it a point to keep low and dark. I 'd use it—but I wouldn't print it. I 've heard what he does when he 's given away. Oh! He 's savage! The clerks are paid in all these places to keep it quiet whenever he *does* come over. Once they did get hold of him in the Howl, when he came over four years ago, and they printed a story about him. Then they found he controlled half the poison ads.: Rodney's Cure, and the Pain-killer and Voler's Pills—and he made 'em print a denial too, displayed. And then he broke 'em! Oh! he 's savage."

"It was I tracked him to that boat on my own risk," said Batterby doggedly. "I paid the clerk at this end out of my own pocket, and he said John K. would be on it, as sure as one can be of him. He 'd booked as Carroll, so 's not to be pestered on board. If I liked to take the trouble I could find out that he 'd landed and what train he took. It 's a cruel shame if I can't make a story for the *Messenger* out of it! His Grace 'll want it too," he added plaintively. "It 's for him to print or not as

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he likes. He knows his way about does the Duke."

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. "You can tell your gang if you like, Batterby, but it 's at your own risk. He 'll ferret you out and he 'll never let go of you. He bites to the bone: specially newspaper men. That 's what he hates most. You know what he is. If they print they 'll get hell, and even if they only talk *you 'll* get hell. I 've told you all I know about him. He comes to London, Paris, Naples, anywhere. Nobody to know when he passed, except his men. And what 's more, he 'll get plenty of people to swear to his being somewhere else. If he makes a row, it isn't my fault. At any rate, he 's here. . . . I 've got to be off. Will you wait while I get my hat and coat?"

Batterby, who had his hat in his hand and his coat on his back, looked uneasy and said, "Yes, if you like." Arthur sauntered off at his slow pace, and the older, heavier, less consequent man watched him slyly well round the corner, and then lumbered up to the Registration Desk. The book was shut. He leaned with a foolish grin of cunning over the desk, winked, and said to the clerk: "Anyone o' the name o' Petre registered to-day?"

The clerk said curtly, "No."

"Nothing like it?" said Batterby, taking out a case with cigarettes upon the one side and notes prominently showing upon the other.

"Nothing," said the clerk icily.

Batterby tapped the thick red leather binding with a square, short forefinger, and winked again. For answer the clerk put the big book on one side and turned away. His questioner waddled back again to the easy chair and wished *he* could earn money so easily. He looked at his watch, and wondered that Arthur was so long. Yet there was nothing wonderful in the delay. Arthur was telephoning. He was telephoning to Mrs. Cyril.

Before he had returned to the lounge and to the impatient Batterby a stout, rather bewildered man, middle-aged and grey, but active in his step, had passed by him, and had gone rapidly through the great turning doors into the street. It was Mr. Petre, seeking a Gladstone bag and linen and hair brushes, and all that might be necessary to restore him to citizenship. Had Batterby known what presence it was that thus passed he would have been a changed man. But Batterby did not know. Arthur rejoined him, the two went out into the street in their turn.

The Strand is not a good place for conversation

in these days, but Batterby was anxious and eager. It was a scoop, if he could bring it off; and poor Batterby lived and kept an unhappy household in Golder's Green upon scoops; and Arthur was his informant on the great world, in return for services rendered before Arthur had climbed—through a knowledge of Arthur's earlier days. Arthur knew everyone now, and yet could still be squeezed. The shorter and older man looked up at his young companion as they jostled eastward towards Fleet Street.

"Don't you think I could risk it, Arthur?"

"Oh! I've told you," said Arthur impatiently. "It's at your risk. But mind you, if he is here he'll have it denied, and if he isn't, it comes to the same thing. You'll get hell. You can't fight fifty million pound."

Batterby sighed. It would mean a great scoop. . . . And he might have had the interview given him. His Grace had given him just that job when he had spotted the secret visit of the French Prime Minister six months before. But French Prime Ministers are small game compared with Americans on the scale of John K. Petre. . . . Then again, if things went wrong, and he could not make the news good, that meant the sack. His Lordship

could be terribly firm; and Batterby thought of the little house in Golders Green and the nagging, dissatisfied wife, and inwardly trembled. . . . No, he couldn't risk it. . . . At least, not unless Arthur would guarantee him, and Arthur wouldn't. Arthur had sworn he would know nothing about it. . . . So there was an end of it. But it was astonishing how full Batterby's mind was of John K. Petre; almost as though he had him there by his side, arm in arm. It is said that very great men thus permeate the air of the cities through which they pass. It may be so. Arthur and Batterby melted into the crowd.

* * * * *

Mr. Petre was a full two hours in making his purchases. One very good reason for such delay was that he had no idea of his measurements. Another, that his recent, his everwhelming misfortune had made him mistrustful of himself. He kept on wondering whether he had filled up a sufficient list. At last he had fully packed his newly-purchased bag; he had brought it back to the hotel; he had followed it up to No. 44. He sat down beside it, counted out what remained of his capital and found fifty-two pounds and a few

shillings left. He plunged again into that depth of thought wherein he groped like a diver in dim water to find some recollection or some clue—and he found none. The enormous loneliness of the position was upon him: it appalled him even more than the approaching end of his resources. He felt all the millions of London round about him, aloof and hostile: dumb . . . when the telephone on the table in his room rang suddenly, and he took it up.

A woman's voice, very clearly articulate, rather too high, asked if that were Mr. Petre, and announced itself as Celia Cyril. It then cleared its throat, but in a very ladylike manner, and Mr. Petre boldly answered "Yes" and waited; concluding, as he waited, that he ought certainly to have answered "No." The voice told him it knew he *hated* being fussed, but he had always made an exception of dear Leonard, hadn't he? So the voice had taken the liberty to send a note which would explain; but the voice had thought (it said) that it seemed better first to ring up before the note would get to him; because the voice knew that he *hated* being fussed. And then thought that perhaps it ought not perhaps to have rung up after all. But it did hope he didn't mind. All of

which clear-headed and decisive stuff Mr. Petre received in a complete confusion.

"My only excuse," the voice went on, "is that you were *so* good to dear Leonard, to my dear husband when he was in the States: two years ago. You know all that has happened since. You don't mind my asking? *Do* you? You remember my Leonard?"

Now at this moment—I write it down without comment, for all that follows is a commentary upon it, but I think it excusable in a man so hungry to know and so dazed as was Mr. Petre—at this moment, I say, Mr. Petre again answered "Yes." The clearly articulate voice continued in a tone of relief.

"Ah, I *am* so glad. I knew it was a liberty. I know you *hate* to be fussed. But I do hope you will be able to come, and you will get my note. It ought to be with you any time now. I sent the car with it." Then the voice said "*Good*-bye" in a fashion which oddly reminded Mr. Petre of pink sugar—but after his great catastrophe he dared not guess whether it were because the late Mr. Cyril or Sir Leonard Cyril, or Lord Leonard Cyril or Leonard Lord Cyril had been connected with sugar, or whether it was only the tone of the voice.

But the recitation of such names suggested to him rather suddenly a book the name of which he perfectly remembered, and he telephoned down at once for the year's *Who's Who*. Now he would make a serious search. He was on a clue.

The first thing he did was to look out Cyril. He found nobody, and in good time it was to be made very clear why he had found nobody of that name. Leonard Cyril was dead. Then he looked out Petre—brilliant thought, and he found many Petres, and read all that was to be read of them closely; but not one suggested anything to his knowledge. He was certainly John K. The clerk had made that clear. There was no John K. in *Who's Who*. He sighed. It was a heart-breaking business. Then, the processes of his mind working more fully, but his sense of personality as blank as ever, he tried the telephone book of London. There was a Mrs. Cyril right enough, and she seemed to be well-to-do, for what she had said about her car corresponded with her address. But when he turned to the Petres he was baulked again: there were too many, and not a John K. in the bunch . . . and after all, why hadn't he thought of it? The States! . . . Was he not an American? . . . There was evidence that he had been in America.

That would make it less incomprehensible—but more difficult to trace through London. . . . And he didn't *feel* American somehow. . . . What a business!

Then came the note. A young child, dressed in yet another uniform and with bright, active eyes brought it in. It was but an expansion of the telephone message he had had before. Mrs. Cyril had only just heard of him from a friend who had caught sight of him (he trembled!) in the hotel. She was taking a great liberty, but her late husband had spoken so warmly of him and of the kindness Mr. Petre had shown him when he visited the United States, that she presumed upon that acquaintance and asked him whether he could not lunch with her next Wednesday?

Mr. Petre delved down again into the depths of his mind. Whatever he may have been in that past life of his, he had evidently been courteous, for he felt the necessity of answering by writing and by messenger, and not by telephone. The more he thought of the affair, the more he discovered at once its possibilities and its dangers. In the last few hours the shrinking from humiliation had become an obsession. He was now fixed in a mood such that he would rather have died than admit

his hidden trouble. All around him, perhaps, would be people who would know who he was; some perhaps would have met him; his hostess at least would have heard much of him. He would have to play up to all that he could hear, to glean everything that he could, and yet not give away his secret.

For some little time he hesitated. Then he considered that if he never took the plunge he might be lost. Either he must recover his past by clues or by inferences, and these could only be had from witnesses; or else live on a few weeks to the end of his money, and then—what?

Evidently he had been—whatever he was—not only a courteous man, but a man of decision. He took up his pen and wrote a rapid note to Mrs. Cyril, saying how pleased he would be to lunch. He rang at once and sent it off by the messenger. He was a little alarmed to learn that her car had been waiting all the time to take that answer back. Mr. Petre might be a man of decision, but he could not compare with Mrs. Cyril. Whoever he (Mr. Petre) might be, and whoever she (Mrs. Cyril) might be, she (Mrs. Cyril) gave points to him (Mr. Petre). And Mr. Petre drew another deep sigh as he considered the peculiar misfortune of his

life, and wondered why he had been pitched upon to suffer so extraordinary a fate.

He could not tell. But I know and I will tell the reader. It was holiday in heaven and a Daemon, genial, ironic, had been given Mr. Petre for a toy to play with a little while.

He glanced again at the letter, turned over the sheet and found a postscript. "You know how discreet I shall be and how familiar I am with your rules. The Press shall not hear a word of it. It was by the merest *accident* that I heard of your presence in London myself, and even if you send an answer that you are not there at all, I shall *quite* understand.—C.C."

Mr. Petre held those words before him, and stared. Then he began to put everything together in a sort of summary. He had been in the States; perhaps he was a native of the States. He didn't think so; he felt it in his bones that he was not an American. Yet . . . at any rate, he had been in the States.

There was another point. The man he had been had some reason or other for keeping very secret; the clerk's manner had proved that. It made him feel anxious. Had he committed a crime? . . . No! On reflection, no. If he had Mrs. Cyril would

not be so keen to have him to lunch with her. He must have had the power to do some good to the late Cyril; he must have had some great position out there in America. . . . . What?

For a moment he was on the point of drafting an advertisement to sundry American papers, and then that shame came upon him and he put down his pen. He gave it up; he trusted to chance; he awaited Wednesday; and having been apparently in that past of his a naturally hopeful man, he took it for granted that at Mrs. Cyril's table some light might break. Then he went down to dinner.

He sat there at his lonely table, perfectly clear upon the roof under which he was (it was familiar to him), upon the date, upon the meaning of all that he read in the paper (he was consecutive upon this, not only for the news of the last twenty-four hours, but also, after a gap of about a fortnight, with many older allusions). Oddly enough, certain dull fragments of American news, meaningless to an Englishman, struck him with particular familiarity; and the name of one town in which a bishop in the middle west had denied his Saviour struck him with a feeling of home; but of himself and of who he was—nothing. It was like standing

". . . And the two ex-Lord-Chancellors agreed."

in a well-lit room and looking through the window at a dense fog outside pressing against the panes.

Then he went upstairs again to No. 44 and took off all his clothes and looked on every edge of shirt and collar and vest and drawers and socks for initials. He found a New York price ticket on his shirt, the word "Paramount" on his collar and "Zenith" woven into his socks, but of initials not a sign, and as for his night-shirt, he had just bought it—not pyjamas; was that instinct a clue? He was tired out. He put it on and went to bed.

CHAPTER II

Mrs. Cyril had received her guests.

It was a vast room in a house on the south side of Grosvenor Square. There was a kind old Cabinet Minister, who was rather deaf and kept on putting his hand to his left ear with a beatified look; a rich young woman who had just married a still richer lord in the North of England, and who wrote small, carefully-sculptured pieces of bad verse; two ex-Lord Chancellors; a banker, and his wife too; Lady Batton (Henry Batton's wife, not the old lady); and Marjorie Kayle, who had only one leg and was very witty. But great as these people were, they were nothing like as great as the room. It was perfectly enormous, and Mrs. Leonard Cyril, relict of the late Leonard Cyril, who had no particular business but had certainly thriven wonderfully by it, and who was herself the daughter of Pallins the old artist, gloried in the dimensions thereof. She murmured that Mr. Petre was late; she lied, for she had deliberately given him an hour twenty minutes later than the others. They

fell to talking of him, of his vast wealth, of his eccentricities, of his mania for avoiding the world and his refusal of his name and movements.

"Oh, I can understand that," sighed Marjorie Kayle, who was perpetually in the papers; and the two ex-Lord Chancellors agreed. But the kind old Cabinet Minister, putting up his left hand to his ear, only said "What?" and beamed. "Petre," bellowed Mrs. Cyril into his better ear. "Petre. The American man. John K. Petre."

"Oh, the American man," said the kind old Cabinet Minister, his face suddenly changing, and assuming the expression proper to a revelation. "Not J. K. Petre, the rotor man?"

"Yes," roared Mrs. Cyril again. "The rotor man. J. K. Petre."

"I can't conceive," said the noble poetess, "what possible good it can do a man to have so much money."

"I don't see what possible harm it can do him," said Marjorie Kayle with asperity, for she herself, poor darling, felt strongly on that point; she resented the great wealth of the woman who had just spoken. "He does plenty of good with it. He gave £200,000 to Peggy's show last year, and it just got them round the corner."

"Who got him to do that?" asked the hostess quickly.

"No one," said Marjorie Kayle—who, indeed, knew nothing but the bare fact, and had got that out of a newspaper. "He does those things suddenly out of his head."

The banker said "Humph!" and for a moment a solid little smile appeared upon his face.

"It 's quite true," said Marjorie Kayle, nodding her head, and now launched in her new character as John K. Petre expert. "He simply won't answer a letter, even on business, and he 's mad against giving anything—'cept when he feels inclined, like this, suddenly; an' then he does the most extraordinary things! He gave a quarter of a million to the famine fund in Sicily, and it came long after the famine because he only heard of it late, through a magazine called *Powler's Humanitarian Weekly*, and then they asked him what they ought to do with it, and he cabled back a text out of the Bible, and they thought he was mad and they divided it up."

"Who?" said Mrs. Cyril severely.

"Oh, they," answered Marjorie Kayle vaguely. "The Sicilians." Then she added simply, "He 's like that."

"Is it true that he wears elastic-sided boots?" said the banker's wife in a weary, over-refined voice. She was a woman full of frills and with a cameo face. Marjorie Kayle took the plunge.

"Not now," she said, greatly daring; and being inwardly a believer in the Higher Powers, she shot up a little prayer that when the great man should come into that room he might not be wearing elastic-sided boots. It was a fair risk, for they had not been seen in any great number since the Boer War. On the other hand, she thought that his boots would probably be very pointed, and might well be of patent leather; but these surmises she kept hidden within her own heart. She had gambled on him enough as it was.

While this enlightened conversation was proceeding one last guest had said nothing. It was a Mr. Terrard; Mr. Charles Terrard, Charlie Terrard, by courtesy the Honourable Charles Merriton Terrard, a stockbroker and without guile. He had frank blue eyes and frank yellow hair which curled; and he was very pleasant. He listened to his elders and betters, to whom also he could often be of service. There was a future before that man.

Mrs. Cyril had just begun, "They say that whenever he washes he ——" when the big yellow

door was thrown open and a servant in archaic clothes said mournfully, "Mr. Petre!" introduced a grey, sturdy, but lively figure, and shut the door very gently again behind him. There was a silence as at the entry of God.

Mrs. Cyril came forward and seized him by the hand. She overwhelmed him with apologies. Nothing would have persuaded her to take such a liberty except her gratitude for all he had done for Leonard; and as she murmured the word "Leonard" a touching moisture suffused her eyes.

The guests all stood around awkwardly, like provincial notables awaiting an introduction to royalty. Mrs. Cyril went through them one by one in their exact order of greatness, and shouted at the kind old Cabinet Minister again, to give Mr. Petre some impression of the way in which one had to talk to him.

Never was a man more deeply impressed than was Mr. Petre by the solemn deference he received. One after another each of those men and each of those women spiritually knelt before him, and there was manifest in their eyes and in their gestures all the spirit of religion. He who showed it least was young Terrard; yet even he showed it plentifully, and Marjorie Kayle exceeded.

"Evidently," thought Mr. Petre, remembering the hotel, "I was right. I am somebody—or I was somebody."

They sat at table, sneered at by six enormous portraits, in another room as large as the first, and having a view through its windows of a mews; and as they so sat the wine loosened their tongues and they talked of things and people, of which Mr. Petre knew some by repute, others not at all. He answered gently such questions as his hostess put to him (he sat upon her right); he assured her that he had had an excellent crossing (for she asked him what kind of crossing it had been); but he was careful not to risk any details, as he had not the slightest idea that he had crossed anything from anywhere. He assured her that he was familiar with London; he told her that he had not yet been to any other house—and all this while he was in terror lest some question more searching than the rest might challenge him and make him flounder past recovery.

The meal dragged on. They had come to coffee. The banker had looked at his watch, and found it was already twenty past two. At each succeeding phrase his hostess put to him Mr. Petre came nearer and nearer to breaking-point under the strain.

He was saved by a magic word. Someone at the

end of the table had pronounced three syllables: "Touaregs." At that sound the whole conversation was in a blaze. Here was something in which all held communion! Here was a subject which struck right at the heart of every man and woman in the room—except poor Mr. Petre, to whom every allusion and phrase and term was Greek and nonsense; of not one could he make anything; yet he was relieved to think that they were off on matters which imperilled him no more.

As the fowls of a farmyard strut aimlessly back and forth picking aimlessly at the ground after the convention of fowls, but very empty of interest in their lives, so had the people round Mrs. Cyril's table spoken first of a play, then of a novel, then of a politician, then of a criminal; and then, still more languidly, of a coming eclipse. Their words were the more vapid and without stuff, the more like sawdust, because each man and woman had in his heart one object only dominating all, and that object was John K. Petre, high above the few lords of the free modern world: fifty million pounds incarnate, and come to dwell amongst us. There, before them, in the flesh.

As the fowls of a farmyard will change their whole beings, clucking and chattering prodigiously and

scrambling together in a swarm, and the whole flock alive with appetite when a handful of grain is thrown down; so did the people round Mrs. Cyril's table change inwardly and outwardly at once upon the appearance of Touaregs. Their souls and bodies became alive, their wings were flustered, their minds clashed and struggled.

Touaregs would go farther. No, they had touched top mark. They were steady. No, they were rocketing. It was astonishing how mulish the French Government was about the concession. Not so mulish as all that: they knew which side their bread was buttered. Marjorie Kayle said that Billy Wootton had squared the French Commissioner. The banker then told the company in general that they knew nothing about it, and Mrs. Cyril eagerly quoted what Charlie Byrne had told her, only that morning, of the new deposits; whereupon one of the ex-Lord Chancellors who had not yet given tongue said with great good sense that when a market ran away like that it didn't matter what news came or didn't come. And the other Lord Chancellor agreed with him. At which the kind old Cabinet Minister smiled, nodded, and said, "Just so!" because he had usually found it safe to use these words on things he couldn't hear.

But if the kind old Cabinet Minister had no notion what it was all about, he was an expert compared with Mr. Petre. Mr. Petre, though his hearing was quite sound, might as well have been listening to a babel of rooks. What were Touaregs ? Where were the deposits ? What of ? How did the French Government come in ? How do you square a Government ? What was a Commissioner ? Who was Billy Wootton and with what instrument did he perform his rite ? And up what did Touaregs go, or down what, and in what were they steady ? What was it all about ?

The eager judgment and counter-judgment, argument, affirmation, bluff, falsehoods, tips, went back and forth in an amazing game : for it is a game where everyone plays his own hand, and where the number of relations is the square of all those present. But it is a game which works to a climax and then halts or languishes ; it is a fire of thorns, burning very quickly to ash ; and Mr. Petre, dazed in the babel and thanking his stars that it prevented questions which might have destroyed his peace, was alarmed to find that the subject drooped and that gaps of silence appeared.

At any moment the whole talk might turn ; it might be a point-blank question on his home, or

Mrs. Cyril leaping to the telephone.

some other matter in which he would be agonised to reply. He was desperately concluding that he must take the first step and say something to lead Mrs. Cyril on till some word of hers should tell him what he did not know, when, just in time, at the end of a silence longer than the rest, the decisive thing happened.

The young broker, Charlie Terrard, deliberately said, looking at Mr. Petre with a slightly quizzical look:

"Well, sir, what do *you* think of them?" To which he bluntly added, "You know more about it than most of us."

One or two of the less controlled faces took on an awkward look, the others went suddenly blank. The two ex-Lord Chancellors exchanged glances covertly and both half smiled:—certainly Terrard had done a monstrous thing! But then, great men like John K. are often straightforward, and sometimes eccentricity of that sort pleases them. They all waited for the answer, not breathing.

Mr. Petre was in torture. If he admitted complete ignorance, what would follow? If he pretended knowledge, he would blunder irretrievably. They were not helping him as he had hoped; they were putting him into a fearful crux.

He made one last desperate effort to fence. He leaned forward with a poised and equal look, like a man who has something to say, and put such a question as he hoped must draw information and help. He said: "What exactly do you mean?"

Young Terrard, having gone so far, went farther, and said with awful simplicity, "Why, Mr. Petre, I mean, would you buy or sell Touaregs? Now, this afternoon?"

The silence turned to ebony; the daring seemed too great, and in her heart of hearts Mrs. Cyril feared a scene. Then Mr. Petre spoke, and decided his fate.

"I shall buy," he said, firmly and distinctly; and then, then, not having the fear of God before his eyes, and determined only on plunging through and saving himself alive from further perils, he pronounced these memorable words, "I shall buy largely." He looked round at the stupefied assembly and smiled a genial smile.

Mrs. Cyril pulled the team together. She said with a little laugh, "That 's all right." One of the ex-Lord Chancellors said, "Oh, curse it, look at that!" It was a passing shower on the pane. The poetess asked Marjorie Kayle whether she could give her a lift. Mrs. Cyril protested that it was early, but her

protest was hollow. They were all, for some reason or other, suddenly filled with an itch for movement; they would be off, and Mr. Petre wondered why.

Dear friends, it was because the earlier you get into a market, if it is a rising market, the better for you, and every man and woman of them knew it, except Mr. Petre himself.

Perfect love casteth out fear; and in their intense love for what each of them was bent on doing, and on doing now, and on doing at once, convention was hard pressed, and fear was routed. What was red and burning in them all—except the banker, the broker, and the kind old Cabinet Minister—was an intense desire for the telephone.

First come, first served. Mrs. Cyril made a move. Lucky woman, *her* telephone was within five yards.

She begged the men to stay behind, and the banker would have been willing enough. *He* wasn't going to bother; and the kind old Cabinet Minister (who, with Mr. Petre himself, was alone innocent of motive in that roomful) wanted a glass of port. Charlie Terrard said without haste that he must go, so with more haste did the two ex-Lord Chancellors, looking at their watches in double unison, like twins.

As for Mr. Petre, he snatched at this general

movement as a relief, and was one of the first to excuse himself hastily. To whom, indeed, young Terrard as the party broke up, and when all had said good-bye to their hostess (herself as hungry for the telephone as is the saintly heart for heaven), with continued boldness (he was so frank and so charming) said as they went through the door together:

"Mr. Petre, are you going my way?"

"I am going to the Splendide," said Mr. Petre, caught.

"I am going past there," said young Terrard; it was true enough, for he had determined to be going wherever Mr. Petre might deign to be bound.

The short shower had been over some few minutes. They strolled southward, and in a leisurely conversation full of simplicity and good humour and good sense Charlie Terrard with his frank blue eyes and frank yellow hair (that curled) had discovered before they reached Piccadilly that Mr. Petre had fixed on no broker in town: not one more than another; it was just like his eccentricities to buy at random and refuse to be bound; it was another millionaire eccentricity to buy through Charlie, and Charlie was only too happy to oblige. It was like yet another of his eccentricities not to appreciate, or to affect to ignore, the danger of

delay and the necessity for early action. It was again so like the man, with his reputation for indifference to wealth, oddly coupled with a passion for accumulation, to leave it almost at a hazard how much he would buy and to affect indifference to the hour at which he bought. He seemed (really it was monstrous) not to know the price that day, and to have no idea of what they would open at on the morrow. It was Charlie Terrard who spoke tentatively of fifty thousand shares, "I think I shall make it fifty thousand," he said. Did he say "shall" or "should"? Mr. Petre passed the figure almost with boredom. He heard also that they were wobbling round 2½. Were they? It was very interesting, no doubt. But he didn't follow it up.

"All right!" said Mr. Petre. "Fifty thousand."

He wasn't clear whether Charlie Terrard was going to buy for him, or on his own.

He wasn't clear upon anything, except his mortal dread that any argument or discussion might bring forth a Monster Question which would give him away.

"All right. Fifty thousand."

An astonishing passage; but things happen like that in this world. No, they don't? Yes, they *do*.

The conversation continued leisured down the comparative freedom from jostle of St. James' Street and Pall Mall. Those fools who had broken away from Mrs. Cyril's like fragments from an exploding shell might think these two would feel as they did the need for hurry. Charlie Terrard knew perfectly well there was none, so far as he and the great John K. were concerned. Touaregs were stagnant, and it wasn't half a dozen wretched punters from among the smart that would reinstate them. Mrs. Cyril was not poor, but women don't do such things on a large scale, and the largest of her scale would be insignificant compared with what he had in mind. As for the two ex-Lord Chancellors, they might potter about with their few pounds and be damned. Marjorie Kayle was a matter of shillings, and she would have to borrow those. They might make their little profits. He didn't grudge them. It wasn't things of that sort that affected a market. It was something very different; it was a mighty rumour, and the confirmation of that rumour: that was what moved a stock. And Charlie Terrard now had the lever of that solidly between his hands.

Charlie Terrard was wrong; not in his judgment of the non-effect of Mrs. Cyril's purchase and the

rest in such a big market—that any fool could have judged. He was wrong in his judgment of the relative scales of their purchases. For of all those who were buying their little packets at that very moment over the wire while he sauntered at his ease southward and eastward with his millionaire, it was Marjorie Kayle who had plunged most deeply. She had stopped to telephone from the Tube station. But she had not telephoned to any broker. She had telephoned to something better than that; she had telephoned to Lord Ashington, and he would act for him and for her. But even his purchase was nothing at all to what was coming.

Charlie Terrard and his Catch were at the door of the Splendide. He looked over his shoulder as he went off and nodded gaily to Mr. Petre.

"I 'll get you fifty thousand. Round about 2½ one ought to"; and was gone.

Charlie Terrard hastened; he was in the City just at a quarter past three, and he had said behind closed doors, and to his partner alone, what he had to say. Only after hours was the thing released.

With the next morning everyone—that is, all the fifty or sixty who count—was full of it. John K. Petre was buying Touaregs.

* * * * *

When Mr. Petre reached his room he realised that panic is a bad adviser.

In his terror and shame lest that roomful should guess his misfortune, he had not only put himself in peril—he did not know the law on these things, but he thought that he might very well have committed a crime—but he had also brought in, with that peril, the peril of a complete discovery. For if things went badly, and that mad order to buy left him under a heavy obligation—whenever a settlement should come (and he knew nothing about the times and the seasons—evidently in that mysterious former life of his, whatever else he had been, he had not been a stockbroker, and yet he had evidently been very rich, and must have made investments: it was all exceedingly bewildering)—and if his inability to meet the same losses (and he was unable to meet anything more than a few pounds) led to a prosecution, everything would come out in Court. Could the law act, he wondered? He didn't know. If it could and did, the law would charge itself with finding out who he was, and all the misery he had desired to avoid would be upon him with tenfold force. Not a mere roomful of rich people would merely suspect him; he would be a laughing stock for the whole of England. And heaven only knew

what friends or nearer ones would be involved in the affair. It was too late to undo it. The thing had gone through.

For a moment he had a wild idea of flight. Then he remembered the diminishing sum that stood between him and disaster. He would do better than that. He would hide himself. With infinite precaution he would hide himself, until there was news one way or the other of what had happened to that dreadful order for Touaregs.

And again, what were Touaregs? He was quite clear upon what shares were; he was quite clear upon the buying and the selling of the same; perhaps he had cautiously speculated in a few hundreds once or twice. No incident of the sort had any place whatever in his mind to-day, and yet the terms seemed familiar enough to him. But fifty thousand! And at what price? 2½ pounds, shillings, francs? What had he let himself in for? . . . It maddened him.

A Bradshaw was part of the furniture of his room. He spread out the map, noted affectionately one of those little curling lines which leave a main railway and stop abruptly in the Wolds. He took the name of the village; he packed his bag, looked up a train; he had half an hour. He went down to

leave his orders. He would keep the room; nothing was to be forwarded to him; to any enquiry they were to say that he had gone out of town, and were not to know when he would return.

It gave Mr. Petre a moment's relief in his suffering to notice with what deference his old friend the clerk noted so strange a plan, without deposit, without explanation. He was more convinced than ever that this unknown Self was of vast consequence. Then, after all this trouble, a new thought struck him. Would it not be better to wait an hour or two? Could he not discover Terrard's address and see whether it had really gone through? Such a man must be in the reference books. The miserable man hesitated, irresolute, when a shock hurled him into a decision. He saw, standing between himself and the light, a most extraordinary figure, tall, aquiline, with intense dark eyes, a waxed and forbidding moustache, black (for it was dyed), and an odd snarling way of speech, of which its owner was profoundly innocent, and which, indeed, he took for the common tone of a man about town. In that blotted-out mystery of the past he must—this sinister apparition must—have known Mr. Petre abominably well. A light of recognition shone in his eye. He strode up, a menacing smile upon

his lips; he addressed Mr. Petre with a dreadful familiarity; he even did what your distant acquaintance commonly forbears to do, he darted out a forefinger, thrust it out against Mr. Petre's side, and winked.

"Not stopping here, eh? Not quite your style? Where 've you been all this time, eh? Hiding?"

Mr. Petre's heart stopped beating.

"No," he said, in a strained voice which he could hardly bring out. "No. . . . I 'm not stopping here." Then he dashed out through the door, leapt into a cab and was gone.

But in that little space to Waterloo, and in the train for two hours, his terror grew and grew. What had he done? What had he been? What thieves' kitchen had he known? Who was that damnable stranger? How many men possessed what secrets of his life—and he possessing not the simplest, not the most innocuous detail of it?

Yes; he must, he must, he must discover; but he must discover before any fatal guess, any frightened random answer of his to some chance question, should destroy him.

* * * * *

One thing consoled him; the valiant loyalty of that Registration Clerk at the Splendide, whom now

he felt to be his own brother in a world of misery and fear. For as Mr. Petre had leapt into that cab he had shot a glance at the dreadful Mephistopheles, and had seen him asking a question at the desk, and had seen the noble official, who had all power in his hands, shake his head resolutely and turn away.

* * * * *

But the whole thing was getting worse and worse ; those brief hours, not forty-eight hours, only the second night after the blow had fallen—and already he was in the net, caught.

But the inn at the little place, when he reached it, comforted him. Surely in that past he had been of the English country and not of the town, still less of any foreign outlandish place, America or another. The simplicity and the goodness of the people wrapped him round like a blanket against the cold of the abominable world. Here, he thought, he could rest. And rest he did, sleeping deeply, exhausted, and woke to the new day less troubled, and, to the next, reposed.

CHAPTER III

JOHN K. PETRE was buying Touaregs.

The news had penetrated to a little room, panelled in the dark oak of Shakespeare's day; for the panelling had come from Arden out of old Kirlby Hall when they pulled it down. It was half lit by four soft candles standing on a glorious table of two hundred years. They shone on silver as old; on quills ranged in order by a royal inkstand. Over the door hung a deep curtain of tapestry which clothed the place with silence. All the air of that room was an air of lineage and endurance and repose.

Yet it was but a backwater in the noisy, the sordid, the very modern iron and concrete offices of the *Messenger*, the offices of that great newspaper which was the Duke's instrument of power.

The Duke himself sat there at that table, which in his heart he felt to be a desk. A very large cigar was cocked up at an angle in the far corner of his considerable mouth, his flabby-fleshed, artificially determined face was bent over the proofs of an

article which a secretary had written but himself had signed—for he could read better than he could write—and he was puzzling as to what he could print above his name and what he could not. He puzzled long; for he had got the problem wrong before now and had paid dear for the blunder.

People said that the Duke deserved his position; and when for the first time in so many years Mrs. Fossilton (whom he had made Prime Minister) had advised the King to give him that supreme title, and to honour Commerce with it, men, though they thought the thing revolutionary—in our time every new step looks revolutionary—at least admitted that the man had made himself, and rightly revered his ruthless expression, his flair for any weakness in others, and his rapid clutch at money.

He had begun life at what is called "the bottom of the ladder"—selling matches as a lad in Melbourne, and an orphan at that, under the plain name of Higgs.

Between those early years and his appearance as an agent, humble enough, put on to bully the smaller fry and to watch the larger fry at Marogavatcho's place in Cairo, there is a gap. It is presumed that even as a boy his strength of will,

his grasp of opportunity, had served him. He had perhaps made a beginning by some rapid piece of minor acquisition—we have no particulars—that had set him upon the status of possible clothes and possible grooming; from that, no doubt, he had gone on. At any rate, he had got somehow to know William Carter when William Carter meant so much in Australia, and yet William Carter wished him away. It was William Carter who had casually dropped his name as a pushing, energetic young fellow for whom some little job might be found, and from the Australian Branch they had sent him to Cairo; again because William Carter said he would do as well as another. It was in Cairo that he worked what is still known there as "Higgs' Great Double Cross," the details of which he never himself explained. I have had them given me by those who understood them (and they were usually given with a good deal of chuckling admiration not unmixed with fear) but they were quite beyond my comprehension.

At any rate, it was a quick rise, and he was in London with a fortune before three more years were out—in 1936; he was then thirty-five years old. This idea of buying the *Messenger* came to him late. He had gone through the usual mill,

first in Parliament, then a baronetcy, keeping himself to himself, never speaking, but doing many a generous deed of which the public heard nothing, especially among the politicians of his own group. He had even (it was said) paid a regular subsidy to one of the most worthy and the most needy of them. His first peerage was startling; but it would not have been if his private activities had been more publicly known. He had preferred to avoid publicity.

He enjoyed no increase of rank until, his fortieth year long passed, he had purchased the great daily, and there, as in everything he did, he succeeded. It was after the negotiations which established Mrs. Fossilton in office that the last step was taken and that a new ducal title, an honour which had been for so long unknown—longer than men could remember—was suddenly given him.

It did not mean what it would have meant in the old days before the War, days which those of us who are now not so far on in middle age can still remember, but of which the younger generation knows nothing. But he wanted it, and therefore it was right that he should have it. There was no great harm done. It is true he had an heir, but the boy had been born late in his life, and had never

His Grace the Proprietor of the 'Messenger' conferring the Order of the Boot on Mr. Batterby, of Golders Green in the County of Middlesex.

known anything but the atmosphere of a Public School, so it was safe enough; and though he had built his own place in the country, instead of buying it, it did not swear with his rank.

He finished reading the proof, ticked it off, and rang. He asked for his secretary, and when the secretary came he said:

"Say, see here, boy, how 's all this shout 'bout John K. Petre and Touaregs?"

"It 's quite true," said the secretary, who was where he was because he knew everything and knew it rightly, and who had become so necessary that he had promotion and now said "Duke" instead of "Your Grace."

"How d'yer know it?" said his Grace, mumbling, with the big cigar jerked to the other corner of his mouth, but by a feat of dexterity, learned in a distant clime, kept admirably at its exalted angle.

"Oh, it 's everywhere, Duke," said the younger man quietly, lighting a cigarette without leave, and sitting down.

"Quite sure, now, boy?"

"Quite."

There was a pause during which the Duke frowned thoughtfully. Then he took the cigar out of his mouth between the first and middle finger of his

right hand—a gesture which he only used in great moments—and said:

"Well, let 'em rip. I 'm not touching the blamed things, anyway," and having said that, he stopped frowning.

"He 's here in London," went on the secretary, smiling slightly and watching his master.

"Here!" shouted the Duke suddenly. "Here? In London? Have they got it?" He jumped up in his excitement. "Have they got it upstairs?" He had his hand out for the bell.

The secretary began: "If I were you, Duke . . ." but the Duke cut him short and snapped back, "Y'er not me, so that 's that." Then as though he were ordering the least of his servants, "Send me Batterby, and keep yer mouth shut."

The secretary rose quietly and without offence—he was used to it; and Batterby was shown in. Batterby wondered what it could be. He stood humbly turning his greasy soft hat round and round in his hands with nervousness, looking up humbly once or twice into his master's face. The Duke leaned back with his legs crossed and the big cigar still going.

"Batterby," said the chief, "did yer know about John K.?"

"Yes, y'r Grace," said Batterby, almost inaudibly.

"And yer didn't tell me, nor no one in this shop?"

"No, y'r Grace."

"Well, it 's the boot, Batterby," said the Duke genially, "De Order of de Boot. D'yer hear?" He uncrossed his legs and turned to the table again.

The unfortunate Batterby tried to stammer out, "Oh, your Grace, I understood . . ."

His master turned round like a barking dog: "Git out!" he said. "D'yer hear? Git out!" And Batterby got out, still humbly, and went through the luxurious little corridor, past the outer office, stumbled down the broad dirty stone stairs of the place; he was as near tears as a man of his age can be. He wondered how he would dare to face the little house in Golders Green. It was ten o'clock.

He elbowed his way into the "Dragon" under the arch; there were always some of the fellows there, and he began to take something for his despair, and to talk shop with the others of that sad, drifting, lost crowd of the newspaper men, the publicists, the slaves. Meanwhile in that luxurious little room a hundred yards away the Duke had sent for his secretary again.

"Whose to worry John K.?" he said.

The secretary's quiet reply surprised him.

"Don't send anyone, Duke; don't have a word of it in the paper."

The master of so many lives had become used to such comment. Time and again it had saved him from pitfalls and from crashes. Though he made up for it by occasional violence, advice from that quarter, when he got it in a certain tone, he never dared neglect; but he growled and he wanted to know the reasons.

Then did his Grace's secretary gently, evenly and without embroidery tell him the story of what John K. Petre had done to his competitor, the *Chicago Judge*, when the *Chicago Judge* had opened its mouth too wide. After that he told another story of what John K. Petre had done to the man on the Riviera who had let the newspapers know the name of his guest. And the Duke in his heart, though he knew very well that the *Messenger* was something bigger than the *Chicago Judge*, and that he counted more in what the modern world reveres, and had more power over it, than any host upon the Riviera, yet felt a certain chill in his breast, and there tolled in it the knell of that sentence which everybody used when John K. was on the carpet, "You can't fight fifty million pounds."

"It 's a scoop," he said bitterly.

The secretary shook his head: "It 's ruin and damnation!" Then he explained himself. "Where 's the scoop? He wouldn't give an interview; and just to say he 's in London—what 's the good of that?"

"Lord, man!" shouted the Duke suddenly, "doesn't he ever want a write up?"

"I think he manages to do without them," said the secretary drily.

The cigar was finished and the Duke threw it away. He handed his coat to the secretary without true courtesy, and the secretary, who knew exactly how far to go, held it for him while he put it on.

"The man 's mad," said the Duke as he struggled into the coat.

"They all say that," said the secretary, pulling the coat collar down and valeting his master as in duty bound.

"They 're ruddy well right," said the Duke, and he stamped out to his private lift.

* * * * *

In the "Dragon" Batterby told his tale. There was nothing to be lost by telling it: there was everything to gain. He had his value. Someone might yet take him on.

"You 've got a contract?" said a friend sympathetically.

"Yes," said poor Batterby over his second. "What 's the good of that?"

"Why, it 's always something," said a third. "The *Messenger 's* always on the nail. You 'll get your cheque to-morrow morning."

"What 's the good of that?" said Batterby again gloomily, as a distant member of the group ordered another round.

"Room to turn round," said the first friend.

Then up spoke a little man whom they all knew but whom they none of them knew enough; he was kind, he was reticent, and he had a reputation for getting things done.

"I 'll go round to Jerry now," said the little man.

"What 's the good of that?" said Batterby for the third time.

"You 're an ungrateful beast," said the little man. "The good is he 'll see you."

"And nothing 'll come of that," said Batterby again into his glass.

But the little man never minded ingratitude or folly or human grief; he enjoyed doing things.

"I bet you I 'm back here in twenty minutes, and that Jerry is seeing you in half an hour," he said.

"Jerry 's not there this time of night," said Batterby, still determined upon woe.

"Jerry 's always there," said the little man, and he disappeared.

He was back as he had said, and in less than twenty minutes. Batterby had got no farther than his fifth; but in the extravagance of penury he ordered another round for them all.

"You 're to see Jerry now, at once," he said. "Up you go."

Batterby would have discussed, but the other pushed him good-naturedly forward; and it was as his benefactor had said. Within half an hour of the first suggestion Batterby was sitting comfortably in a chair which Sir Jeremiah Walton had courteously pushed toward him with his own hands. Sir Jeremiah was a great editor. He knew the House of Commons above and Fleet Street below. He had wanted Batterby for years. Batterby had the reputation for finding out things, and the right things, better and quicker than any newspaper man in the "Street."

"Well now, Mr. Batterby, this is what one may call sudden like," said Sir Jeremiah genially. "Ef I had known as you were free, why, man"—then he gave a cunning glance at the simple face before

him, and said, "Ye 've not been trying on any games, 'ave yer?"

"I was told you wanted me, sir," said Batterby. "I don't know what you mean by games." He was still sore.

"No offence, Mr. Batterby," said Sir Jeremiah. "No offence," and he handed his cigarette case to him to emphasize the good feeling. Mr. Batterby took a cigarette. "So you 've left the *Messenger*, 'ave you? That 's what they tell me. Well, I don't suppose you 'd mind our crowd."

"No, sir," said Batterby, taking care not to grasp the lifebuoy with too much enthusiasm.

Sir Jeremiah laughed pleasantly.

"Thought they could make a story about John K. did they?" he said. "Funny how child-like people do stop! I wouldn't have thought it of 'em. Of the Duke, I mean. 'Owever, you can't ever tell. Now, if I *'ad* been asked," went on Sir Jeremiah with the happiness of his very considerable fortune spread all over his face, "if I *'ad* been asked what risky thing I *wouldn't* do, just now this minute, I should 'a said, touching Touaregs; and if I had been asked what was suicide, I should 'a said, touching John K. D'yer get me?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Batterby, thawing a little.

Sir Jeremiah Walton, God's Servant.

"That 's what I thought, sir. I told his Grace that."

"A? And what did 'e say?"

"Well, sir," said Batterby slowly, recalling the exact terms of the conversation in the inner room of the *Messenger*, "his Grace gave me to understand that he greatly needed this piece of news, and he told me that he could not conceal his regret that I had not imparted it to him. I told him that I thought I had acted for the best, and he answered: 'I am sure, Batterby, you did what you thought best. But don't let it occur again.' Well, sir, I may have been wrong, but that 's a tone I am not used to; so what I answered was this. I said: 'Well, your Grace, I am afraid if I don't give satisfaction here I am not where I should be.' 'Oh, don't say that,' he said; but I was firm and I said: 'Yes, your Grace, I don't say which is to blame, but I do say that I must regard my connection with the *Messenger* as being at an end,' and then, sir, I went out. You mustn't blame me, Sir Jeremiah, I think I was acting as one gentleman should to another."

During this long speech Sir Jeremiah Walton had put his head more and more on one side and watched with greater and greater interest the features and the delivery of Batterby. But all he

said was: "You were right about John K., Batterby. And s'posing we wanted a story from yer to-night, Batterby, what could yer give us?"

"Well, Sir Jeremiah," answered Batterby, thinking slowly, "there have been no letters or anything between us."

"That 's all right," said Sir Jeremiah, waving his hand. "We 'll 'ave that settled before you leave," and he named a figure.

"I have got what they 're saying of the Duke's own last little affair," said Batterby at last. "The Hotel in Rome. Him being kicked down the main staircase," he explained with a beautiful candour.

"Don't want that," said Sir Jeremiah, shaking his head, but this time laughing openly. "Dog don't eat dog."

"I 've got the story they 're sending to Paris to-night, which was to have come out first in Paris and then in London next day. They 've squared the *Messenger*, Sir Jeremiah. If you like it you can have it."

"Eh?" snapped that politician eagerly. "Not the Foreign Office Note?" Batterby nodded. "By Go—Gum! That 's the style!" The knight was radiant. He was so moved that he opened a bottle of ginger ale, filled a glass and offered it to

his guest. "That's the style! Ye're a trump, Batterby! Ye're a trump!"

"Best respects," said Batterby, lifting the ginger ale and falling into the manner of his youth.

"Granted, I am sure," said Sir Jeremiah courteously. "We don't allow anything stronger than that, yer know, Batterby." And he winked, "Not 'ere, anyow." And he winked again.

"I know, sir, I know," answered the other, conscious that the "Dragon" was within call.

Thus did Mr. Batterby recover what he had lost and rise from where he had fallen; and thus were the fortunes of one man unmade and made in one night, and the Duke's reputation put in peril and just saved, and the secrets of Great Britain prematurely disclosed; and all this through the unconscious action of poor Mr. Petre, who would not have hurt a fly, and who at that hour of the night was already sleeping his good sleep down in the peace of the Hampshire country-side.

* * * * *

There is among the many departments of our well-ordered State a department which would be known if we were Chinese as "The Board of Things to be Known and Not to be Known." Its seeming simple and deceptive name wild horses shall not

tear from my sealed lips; and the reader must content herself with surmise.

Over this small but exceedingly important and admirably efficient cell of the Executive presides a man of good birth, education and manners (for it is a permanent). He is elderly and a little jaded, but astonishingly on the spot.

Some hours before those much greater men, the Duke and the Knight, had been exchanging civil nothings with the ingenuous Batterby, this permanent official (K.C.B., Porter Mansions, £3,500, Eton and Trinity. Recreation, Golfing. Clubs, Travellers', Blue Posts) was saying not more than half a dozen phrases to an equal in social rank, an inferior in years and office.

"You know that damned Yankee 's in town?"

"Yes."

"They 've told you it 's the usual note?"

"Oh! Yes—and Jessie Malvers said she particularly hoped . . ."

"That 's all right. She 's not the only one. You sent round to the Press Department?"

"Yes. Nothing 'll come out—as usual. But I don't think we need worry much. He 's put the fear of God into everybody."

"He was at Celia Cyril's, all the same—at

Minatory but Patient Admonishment of the Ignoble Algernon by Breeches of Bolter's Club, St. James' (S.W.1).

lunch to-day," said the older man getting up and mechanically settling a sheaf of paper on his table, as he prepared to go out. "His name 's not to get about, in spite of that. I don't think he 'll go out much. You 've had the division warned?"

"Johnson saw to that. They 've got a plain clothes man both sides and another following."

"That 's all right," said the superior. "Going my way?"

"Yes."

They took down their hats and coats from the lobby and sauntered off side by side till they came to the Horse Guards' Parade, and so up the Duke of York's Steps to the Club.

* * * * *

That same night a young and guileless constable of Division Phi, his head relieved of its preposterous helmet and his hands swinging at ease between his knees as he sat on a bench with betters, enjoying a brief and well-earned leisure, said: "That foreign millionaire at the Splendide, him as they call . . ."

"Never mind what they call him, me lad," broke in a voice of authority, years and stripes, "the less *you* call him anything the better for you. Them 's orders." And a deep silence reigned.

* * * * *

In Bolters, oldest and noblest of clubs, the young ignoble Algernon piped out, "I say, Breeches, is it true this millionaire fellah . . ." But him also Breeches, irreverently so called, a man of much acquaintance and worldly sense, rapidly led aside, and, far out of earshot of all others, said in a low grumble: "You have the sense to keep quiet about that, about him, and you won't regret it. Don't you remember what happened to poor Harry?" At which Algernon marched off dazed but obedient.

CHAPTER IV

MR. PETRE, settled in that country inn, felt for the first time in those days a relief from tension. He began to realise how intolerable that tension had been, and a plan vaguely formed itself in his mind to bury himself altogether; perhaps even to go off abroad, take another name, and be free of worries which were growing intolerable, and of a problem that could not be solved. It was even a comfort to him to believe, as he had come to believe, that he could never recover himself, his name, or his past. Some deeply-rooted but no longer conscious habit of mind made him take for granted that his livelihood would necessarily be provided. It was well for him that he had not to put that illusion to the test!

He enjoyed a deep night's rest, and by the next morning had already determined to look up a train for Southampton and the hours of the boats, when the morning paper, which waited upon his table, turned his mind suddenly into another channel. For on the last page, where he had casually opened

it, he saw a violent headline : " BLAZING TOUAREGS," and read the astonishing series of prices soaring up, in the course of the day before, the morrow of his leaving town : $2\frac{5}{8}-\frac{7}{8}$, 3, $3\frac{1}{2}$, 3, $3\frac{1}{8}$, 3, $3\frac{1}{4}$, $3\frac{3}{4}$, $3\frac{1}{2}$. He read the comment of the City Editor—the comment of a man ignorant, puzzled, and pretending in his style omniscience. Someone had got early news of a new French surrender ; a new pocket of the deposits had been found—it was said. It was better to await confirmation. The sudden rise seemed hardly justified—and so on. The City Editor was groping. Yet what had happened was simple enough. First had come a few little heaves. Everyone in that luncheon-room—except the banker—had given their orders. Even the kind old Cabinet Minister, who, driving away with his niece, the banker's wife, had with difficulty grasped what was toward, was dragged in. For that excellent woman had bawled at him as they span away from Mrs. Cyril's door, " Uncle Tom, buy Touaregs ! "—and Uncle Tom, with his gentle, futile smile had said, " Eh, what ? " The lady had repeated in a scream, " Buy Touaregs ! " and the word " buy " had penetrated the passage of that senile ear. A younger gleam had illumined the statesman's eye ; he had said almost briskly, " Eh,

what? Buy what?" His niece sinking back pettishly on the cushion had muttered, "Silly old ass!" Then, remembering a common interest, she had braced herself to a supreme effort and roared, "TOUAREGS!" and seeing ineptitude spreading once more over her uncle's finely inherited features, had taken a little gold pencil and a diary from her bag, had scribbled in shaky letters to the bumping of the machine, "TOUAREGS"—torn off the page, and thrust it into his hand. He nodded. At last he understood. And she dropped him at his door just in time to get the order through.

Charlie Terrard had done better. Better than the banker's wife, better than the kindly old Cabinet Minister, better than the two ex-Lord Chancellors, better than Mrs. Cyril herself; better even than Marjorie Kayle; better, far better, than the solid banker himself, who as he trudged manfully back to his office, had turned the thing over in his mind and had determined with sound business sense that when a man like John K. Petre said publicly that he was buying it meant quite certainly that he was unloading. Therefore had that banker shrewdly refrained from touching the affair and thereby missed a pile.

The stock, still sticking, had taken its first lift in

that last hour of Wednesday, and next morning the public came tumbling in. Touaregs went soaring up at once like a happy soul released from the bonds of flesh. They grew strong and winged, they stormed heaven. The week-end passed in a fever. With the first bids of Monday they were shooting out of sight. $4\frac{1}{8}$–$\frac{1}{4}$ at the opening, $4\frac{1}{2}$, $4\frac{3}{4}$—my word, *Five!* Five and a *quarter?* Six . . . could they have touched Six? Yes,—and passed it.

Charlie Terrard before that Monday's business closed was alarmed. They got quite out of hand; at any moment there might be trouble. He blamed himself for not selling; but the fever had touched even him, and he waited another night. With Tuesday the curve was still slightly on the rise, though now and then wobbly. Rather late, on a falling market, Charlie Terrard sold. What he himself made I have never discovered; it was very pretty. But for Mr. John K. Petre's account there was a clear profit of £73,729 16s. 3d. Then came the very full reaction, with which these pages have nothing to do; and in many a lonely parsonage, in many a quiet country cottage of the purest Drury Lane, gentlemen and ladies who had bought at anything between 5 and $6\frac{1}{4}$ were

hastening to cut losses in time—and by their eagerness and multitude hastening those losses—as Touaregs dropped down again to something near their true, their original, their humbler level.

Away down in Hampshire Mr. Petre watched those figures with a vague, imperfect comprehension of their meaning; but he had at least a general impression that he was safe. Of when settling day might be, of what settling day might mean, he knew nothing; but he saw that something had happened which—unless Terrard was hopeless—made him secure. His first wild thought of flight left him altogether. He determined to return; and only when he had made that determination did it occur to him that if he had fled he would have come in a very few weeks to the end of his tether.

He made no haste to get back to London, though the hotel was again his goal. The freedom from haunting terrors of publicity and pursuit was grateful. He stopped at one place and another, drinking in the spring. And when he got back to the Savoy he was refreshed and strengthened to meet whatever might be awaiting him, though his nervousness returned as he got back into his room and looked for his correspondence.

There was only one letter, in the business

envelope of Blake and Blake, upon his table; and within it a very few formal lines, and a cheque for £73,729 16s. 3d.

* * * * *

The importance of any sum of money differs with the habits of the recipient. It is possible that Mr. Petre in the full knowledge of what and who he was would have found that sum sufficient, but nothing overwhelming. It is possible that it might have seemed to him an incredible fortune. If he were what all indications made him out to be, it was but one fairly successful minor transaction. If he were what a very vague, very confused, but permanent profound sense warned him that he was, it was a miracle, changing all his prospects.

But neither the one attitude nor the other was that of Mr. Petre as he spread out the cheque before him and stared rather stupidly at the figures. His preoccupation was not with the magnitude of the sum, nor with its comparative insignificance. His preoccupation was with a much simpler question—of what he should do with that little bit of pink paper. He knew, just as he knew the Strand, and the map of England, and Bradshaw and the rest of it—though he did not know himself—that there were such things as banks and banking

. . . Spectacles adorning a face like the full moon."

accounts, and that pieces of paper of this kind went through that machine. But he stood like a child in the matter of how to begin.

Here again the simplest course would have been to have looked up Terrard in the book, met him and consulted him. But that would have been to give himself away, and to open that series of questions the starting of which he had come to dread as a man dreads an operation. He did what all men do when they are quite at a loss. He plunged. He put that cheque into an hotel envelope, put the envelope in his pocket, walked aimlessly through half a dozen turnings, and entered the doors of the first bank he saw. It was a branch, neither small nor great, doing business briskly in a quarter of large shops; one of a score of such branches in central London, nothing more.

The furniture was familiar to him, for banks are all upon a pattern; and the brass railings and the mahogany desks and the glass swing doors and the little army of clerks all scribbling in huge leather-bound books, gave him, he knew not why, an odd association of discomfort and dread: of irritation and humiliation: of worries. But the feeling was slight, a long and far-off thing stirring in the depths of his mind. He went straight up to

a worthy young gentleman in round spectacles adorning a face like the full moon, who was rapidly counting slips with a dampened finger behind the railings. He simply pushed over the cheque.

The worthy young gentleman in round spectacles, mild, moonlike, but precise, turned it over, shot a glance at the back, pushed it back to the newcomer and said:

"Isn't endorsed."

Mr. Petre looked at him with a vacant look of perplexed inquiry.

"Are you the payee?" said the humble associate of international finance, with just as much impatience as he ever allowed himself. But Mr. Petre boggled at the word "payee."

"Are you the person to whom the cheque is made out?"

He understood that! "Yes," said Mr. Petre.

"Do you want to pay it in?"

"I—I suppose so," said Mr. Petre.

How great is England! The young man went off with no more concern than if he were carrying a postage stamp. He was absent about five minutes, during which time Mr. Petre stood gently drumming his fingers upon the counter and wondering what would happen next.

"His forehead witnessed to a lifetime of profound thought, his white beard to careful grooming."

No one had overheard the conversation except a porter in gorgeous uniform, and he saw nothing extraordinary in it. He was used to eccentrics of all kinds, to millionaires in tatters and to frauds and to plain fools; they passed before him in an unceasing stream.

The moonlike youth returned.

"Do you wish to open an account?" he said.

"Open?" said Mr. Petre.

"Do you wish this cheque," said the selenian patiently, "to be put to your credit? Do you wish to draw against it . . . when it has been cleared?"

"Credit" was clear enough. "Draw" was ambiguous. "Cleared" was quite meaningless.

"I want it to go in here," said Mr. Petre simply.

His friend (or opponent) on the other side of the counter sighed and once more disappeared. He was not absent so long this time, and when he returned there was clearly apparent, in spite of his immense reserve, something of awe in his manner, and a great deal of new courtesy.

"Mr. Petre," he said, in a respectful, very low voice, "the manager would like to see you."

A wild dread pierced like a lance through Mr. Petre's inmost soul. He had an impulse to dash through the doors—but he was no longer young,

and he feared pursuit; so he said "Yes," in a voice which he prevented from trembling by an assumption of boldness, and just at that moment a very charming, quietly dressed, ironical, smiling man in the thirties, spare, and with a high voice, came up welcoming him and saying:

"Oh, Mr. Petre? Mr. Petre, I presume? I wonder whether you could be so kind—whether you could spare a moment! The manager would really be very much honoured . . ."

Mr. Petre followed him mechanically through a door, down a deeply carpeted passage on the walls of which were three engravings of the Mother Bank in the City of London; one dated 1815, one 1852, and the last 1930; they displayed a progressive decay in the architectural sense of bankers. The charming man pushed open a further door with grace, with decision, with reverence, and Mr. Petre found himself in the presence of a very fine old English gentleman, solid, rubicund, who stood up solemnly at his entry and welcomed him with a sensible apology for taking up his time. His high forehead witnessed to a lifetime of profound thought, his white beard to careful grooming.

"It is very good of you indeed, Mr. Petre; very good of you, I am sure. Pray take this chair."

And he put a piece of sacred furniture, preserved from the beginnings of the Mother House, in front of the excellent coal fire which burnt in an Adams fireplace, preserved from the beginnings of the Mother Bank. It was of marble ; a sacrificial frieze supported upon Doric columns. Above it stood a clock, preserved from the beginnings of the Mother Bank, gilt, and supported by a figure of Time with a scythe and an hour-glass, signed " Letellier, de Paris ; au Palais Royal," in thin, careful script ; the whole under a glass case.

The two men sat down, and the manager opened genially.

" Well, Mr. Petre, we had no idea you were in London."

" No," answered Mr. Petre, after a pause ; then quite idiotically. " I mean yes." He was on the point of adding the day of his arrival, when the terror of inquisition leapt up before him, and he was silent.

" We are greatly honoured, Mr. Petre," said the manager, thrusting the tips of his fingers together and separating them once or twice in habitual fashion. " Ah, by the way . . ." he rang a bell. " Have you given your signature, Mr. Petre ? "

What responsibility was this ? But Mr. Petre

did as he was bid ; he rose, wrote on a slip of paper which the attendant put before him, " John K. Petre " in a bold hand. It was the second time he had inscribed that fatal name. It was his now and on record. He was in for it. But anyhow, what did it matter ? There was no harm done. He was sure of the Petre, and John K. was what they had recognised at the hotel. It was as John K. that he was known there. An odd combination " John K." He must remember to avoid the mere initials, J. K. He must keep to the " John." Mentally he performed the operation half a dozen times, and the signature " John K. Petre " rose before his inward eye, certain and fixed.

So did it rise, you may well believe, before the inward eye of that happy manager. It rose before his inward eye surrounded by an aureole of heavenly light : letters to be counted among the stars. There was a pause.

" They are preparing your book, Mr. Petre," said his host, at length. " K . . . is ? "

By a happy providence Mr. Petre, on the point of answering, pulled up. He might—such is the particularity of men when they begin to use their imagination—have made a conversation by surmise. He might have guessed Kenneth or Kaspar, and

Lord knows what would have happened then! for there was no John Kenneth or John Kaspar in the empyrean of high finance. But the playful Daemon who had been given his destinies for a pastime shielded him from such a blunder. He remained obstinately dumb. The manager respected his reticence. He sent out a brief note, and in the depths of that vast mansion of gold a serf engrossed in fine black letters upon a parchment cover, bold and triumphant, "JOHN K. PETRE." Nothing more. And what bank, let alone what obscure branch bank, could want more?

"And what kind of cheque book shall I send for, Mr. Petre?" said the manager kindly, as though he were offering a choice of viands.

Once more the playful immortal shielded his favourite son.

For Mr. Petre had not the least idea what he should reply, nor whether he was being asked to make a choice between various colours, or various shapes, or sundry magic names. And he would have stumbled and blundered in his reply, had not the other immediately continued: "Shall we say fifty crossed to order? It is much the more convenient form for us, is it not?"

"Yes," said Mr. Petre, with dignity and emphasis.

"Fifty crossed to order." Then he fell silent again.

"Of course, Mr. Petre," continued the great man, with a touch of nervousness strange in such a voice and so well poised a mouth, "we shall be happy to do anything you may require during your stay in London. Any transaction or—ah—I won't say *advice*," and here he smiled with dignity, "but any—well—anything you may require."

"Yes, certainly," said Mr. Petre. "Certainly. By all means." He could hardly say less.

The pause lengthened. Mr. Petre rose. His host rose with him. "A thousand thanks," he said, "Mr. Petre. We shall only be too pleased. Too pleased." He nodded, made the slightest possible inclination of his head, and Mr. Petre bowed and was gone. He was conducted back with great ceremony through the deeply-carpeted corridor, past the three engravings of the Mother Bank in 1815, 1852 and Present Day; and as he would have gone hurriedly out past the counter, was gently detained while his courteous, his even obsequious guardian, handed him an oblong cheque book, which he thrust hurriedly into his pocket as he disappeared.

So ended the first episode in a great career.

* * * * *

When Mr. Petre got back to his room in the hotel he first of all bolted the door—he could hardly have told you why; it was through an odd feeling that he was about to do something that would make him ridiculous if he were caught at it. Then he pulled out the cheque book from his pocket and looked at it closely and curiously inside and out. He sat down at the table and opened the cheque book, holding it down flat with either hand and gazing at the first form and its counterfoil.

As he did so a perfect familiarity returned, though no personal memory whatsoever: only that same odd feeling of ill ease which had suddenly struck him when he came into the bank, and which was renewed in him at the aspect of this banking thing. Whatever he had been, banks or banking had in some way bothered him. He sighed, and then more cheerfully considered that after all even this dim sensation was a kind of clue. He mused. Perhaps he had been—perhaps he was—a very great banker somewhere or other, but a banker who had got into trouble: what kind of trouble? The question cast him down again. Then his spirits rose as he recalled the way he had been treated. Whoever he was, the trouble either was not very great or had not yet come out. It suddenly

struck him as he thus pondered over the simplicity of the affair, that he had been a fool not to cast out feelers. A few very discreet allusions, a few apparently innocent questions cautiously framed, might have led him to know more. He would rather, far rather have died (such was the odd effect of his misfortune) than let a human being guess it even in the most distant fashion. But if he led them on . . . ? He would think about it . . . He would frame a few phrases and be ready to bring them out at the right moment. Then he turned to the open cheque book again.

Yes, it was perfectly familiar. That was where you signed, and those little blank spaces beyond the perforations on the left were the counterfoils where you marked how much you had signed for, and there was the place for a date ; but he was worried for a moment as to whether the figures came above the writing or below it ; then the image of the cheque he had just paid in came to his mind. Of course, that was what had brought it all back to him. He felt confident. He could go ahead, so far as that little detail of his new life was concerned, and there was an ample balance. He wrote down the main sum, £73,729 16s. 3d. on the inside of the cover. Then he turned to his desk and considered

the questions he should frame, the leading questions which might gradually get men without their knowing it to tell him who he was.

He put down a little list of what he already knew. He had been in the States, he had been there some little time at least, and perhaps for a lifetime. If he was an American citizen, at any rate he knew London well. Perhaps if he went back to the States he would discover there what he was; it might all return to him in the familiar sounds and sights and smells. But it was a big effort to make for finding out something that might be discovered much more easily or that might return to him at any moment. He had in the States befriended a certain Mr. Cyril, now dead. A Mr. Leonard Cyril. Plenty of people must have known this Mr. Cyril, for by his widow the man was rich and her acquaintance nobby. If he went about it quite carefully, in some company where his name was not known, he might hear what kind of man this Mr. Petre was who had thus befriended Mr. Leonard Cyril, a man so wealthy that his very widow rolled in it—to judge by her house and guests. Then there was the other main clue, he had been in a train arriving at a certain hour at Paddington. Now that he had collected his wits it would be a simple matter

to find out where that train had started from. Yes, there were quite a number of clues. It ought not to take long. He turned to the Bradshaw. A train from Cardiff came into Paddington at one. He did not know that his own train, the boat train from Plymouth, had been half an hour late. He noted that Cardiff train and its stops. He had come from Cardiff or beyond, or joined at Swindon. It wasn't much of a help but it limited the field.

Then his mind passed again to those questions he had to frame. But it must be done with tact. He saw himself again in Mrs. Cyril's house trying to shepherd her words into his fold. He might begin in a tone of gentle and respectful condolence: "When I met Mr. Cyril . . ." and then hope that she would interrupt with, "Ah, yes! How good you were to him in New York"—or Topeka, or wherever the damned place was. But then again, she might meet him with a counter question, and say, "Oh, do tell me, please, how Miriam is?" Then he would get it between wind and water, and if he had shuddered a moment ago, now he trembled. It was not so easy as it looked.

A brilliant thought leapt into his brain. And as it leapt his guardian Daemon laughed.

He rang the bell, he unbolted the door. He asked

if they had in the hotel any American books of reference. They had a New York telephone book, and a very strange, short, fat volume in which were the names of the American great who still survived in this sad world to the end of November, 1952. For there was a brutal note on the title-page, "The Editor cannot guarantee that none of the names mentioned in this annual, which went through the press at the end of November last, may not since have died." There was no John K. Petre. He was ashamed to ask for more books of this library. He went down to the ground floor and consulted the London Directory. There was no John K. Petre. He made a note that he would look, as a last and desperate chance, at the New York Directory, and would guarantee it to say if he had ever lived in New York. They had one—of two years before. There was no John K. Petre.

Then another ruse suggested itself to him. He would with infinite pains secure the services of a man—perhaps there were those who did it for a living—of some man who would find out for him all about Mr. John K. Petre.

He went down by the great stairs turning over in his mind the strange dearth of John K. Petres in the printed lists. Clearly an enormous John K.

Petre did, somewhere, dominate the world; but where? He formed the plan of consulting his one friend at the Registration counter.

He made his effort. He went to the clerk standing at the great book of registry, and asked him in a low voice (after looking about to make sure that no one could hear) whether he might be told the name of some agency or person who could look up a small obscure private point for him while he was in London. It was confidential. The clerk, who made an honest penny, among many dozen other honest pennies, by recommending the right people, wrote out at once upon his own card a name and an address: "Jos. Daniels, 27 Birkham Street, Soho."

"Mr. Petre," he said, with his usual respect, which seemed so exaggerated to the unfortunate man to whom it was addressed, "if you will just go and give that personally, I think you will get all you want. There is no proper office, and no name put up. Mr. Daniels is too careful for that. He has worked wonders, to my knowledge. Never mind the look of the house. Don't write. He has no telephone, either. Just go there; and when you find him in, give him this card of mine."

And thus was the clerk assured of his commission.

Mr. Petre was not quite sure that he had done

right. Even one human being knowing but one step of his research was a peril; but he had no other choice, or rather, it was safer than addressing himself to some public firm. He set off at once for Birkham Street. He found the house, or rather, the door; a grimy door next to a little foreign restaurant. He rang. He was let in by a slatternly woman who seemed to have caught something of her master's air, for she certainly looked as if she knew too much.

He asked for Mr. Daniels, and was overjoyed to find that Mr. Daniels was in.

He found a little, dark-haired man, with keen eyes and a full mouth, and an expression as though the world amused him—which indeed it did; but as if also, he were sparing in his words, which indeed he was.

There were, as Mr. Petre had been warned, no marks of an office, nothing to betray Mr. Daniel's trade. It was a dingy room, stuffily furnished with a few old horsehair chairs, and Mr. Daniels as his visitor came in laid down a paper which he had been reading, rose and asked him, when he had looked at the card, and offered one of the horsehair chairs, of what service he might be.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Petre earnestly, feeling

that unless he began the matter at once he would never have the courage to begin it at all, "it is very simple. I am desired—I have been asked—at any rate I have occasion to find out . . . what I can about a Mr. John K. Petre. You know the name?"

Mr. Daniels smiled sweetly.

"Oddly enough," he said, "I *do* know the name. If you had asked me to find a man who did not know the name, you might have given me more difficulty." His smile remained upon his full lips, and he held his head back somewhat, examining Mr. Petre in the fashion a humorous diplomat might use if he were asked by a casual stranger to talk upon secrets of State.

"You have never seen him?" said Mr. Petre.

It was a foolish question; for after all, if Mr. Daniels had already recognised his guest, Mr. Daniels would have greeted him, and perhaps he might even have remembered Mr. Daniels. But perhaps Mr. Daniels *had* seen him; perhaps Mr. Daniels *did* know him. Mr. Daniels had a mysterious smile upon him. The whole thing was very perplexing.

"No," said Mr. Daniels slowly. "No. I have never seen Mr. Petre. Nor has anyone that I

know of," he added, gazing up blankly at the ceiling. "Nor," he continued emphatically, after a pause, and looking Mr. Petre full in the eyes, "nor are you likely to come across anyone who has; not easily!"

"Exactly," said Mr. Petre. "Precisely. . . . Could you . . . my dear Mr. Daniels," and here he leaned forward, "I am prepared to pay well; to pay largely. You have but to name your figure. Now, do we understand each other? Can you not discover for me any of the leading facts with regard to . . ."

But Mr. Daniels interrupted him, putting his hand firmly down upon the table and still looking Mr. Petre in the face, only rather more sternly.

"I do not know who you are, sir," he said. "You have not given me your name, and no doubt you have your own good reasons for not doing so. But I can tell you this—and it will save you a good deal of trouble. It is not worth *my* while—it is not worth *anybody's* while—to hunt that particular game. Do you understand?"

Mr. Petre understood about as much as if it had been Choctaw, but he looked wise, nodded, and said:

"Yes! yes! I understand."

"It 's mere waste of time," said Mr. Daniels, a little more kindly, and getting up as he spoke to show that there was nothing more doing. "If I cannot talk to you about it nobody can—and you may be certain that nobody will."

There was a long silence between the two men. Mr. Petre broke it with a lie.

"Yes—I understand," he said.

His guardian angel wept and his guardian Daemon shook with laughter.

Then Mr. Petre went out in a mist of moral fog so thick that his moral hands were groping all round. He had feared something like madness in himself when his misfortune fell upon him. Now it looked as if the rest of the world were mad as well.

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Meanwhile in the parlour of the bank the manager was speaking to the spare and courteous man who had introduced the great client.

"He 's an extraordinary fellow, Tommy; we 've all heard of him. Now we 've seen him at it—in the flesh."

Tommy nodded, and was amused. "It 's much stranger than a book," he said.

"Yes," answered the manager ponderously

enough; and added the original words, "Life is stranger than fiction."

"What astonishes me," said Tommy, "is the way he comes up to sample. He went on exactly like a film; it was better than that, it was the exact echo of himself, wasn't it? Or like a photograph?"

"He 's always done it," said the manager, with the pompous assumption of knowledge drawn at fourth hand, and accurate enough. "I don't know whether it is that he likes the mystery of it, or that he has got some mania for keeping everything to himself; but he did exactly the same thing in Paris, two years ago. He blew into Rogers's, started an account, behaved like a lunatic—but quite gently—asked the most ridiculous questions, made a sudden haul in what nobody was thinking about, the Bordeaux Loan—he had heard something—left the whole pile on current account for three months, and then transferred it by cable. Without a word of writing or anything. They had had the use of the money all that time, and they 've been living ever since with their mouths open praying he 'll blow in again."

Tommy nodded, holding his chin in his hand.

"We shall not keep him," he said; "but it will be useful while it lasts," and the manager nodded

in agreement. Then they both smiled, and returned each to his task.

It has been said by a Great Victorian Bore that if you could take samples of the conversation going on in our great cities at any one moment you would think you were listening to parrots repeating themselves. He was right.

Not indeed at that exact moment, but less than three hours later, the clerk of the register of the Splendide, having gone off duty, met Mr. Daniels (as was his custom) in the bar of the "Beaver." And Mr. Daniels' first question was:

"Who was that old fellow you sent me to-day, Harrison?"

The clerk drew a little closer, put his mouth close to Mr. Daniels' ear, and murmured the name.

For once in his life Mr. Daniels showed real, honest, innocent surprise. His eyes opened widely, and then his expression changed to a mixture of vast amusement and vast admiration combined.

"By God!" he said, "he 's a genius!"

"We all know that," answered Harrison drily.

"A genius!" shouted Mr. Daniels, ordering a second round on the strength of it. "A genius! He comes into my room like a lamb and asks me to find out about himself!"

The Partners.

"Testing you, he was," said the clerk Harrison with profound psychology.

"That 's it," answered Mr. Daniels wisely, wagging his head from side to side. "Testing me! And didn't find me wanting! Ah! He knows Jos. Daniels by now! He 'll know who he came to." And the clerk ordered a third round on the strength of that little triumph, which both of them had won. The mighty man now knew the accuracy of Harrison's choice in private detectives, and would trust him now for ever: there ought to be something in it. The mighty man knew the fidelity of Daniels: and surely something would come Daniels' way also. He would know that his privacy was safe in such hands.

That same evening, innocent of so much power, the original author of these movements slept, and forgot his troubles till the morning light.

CHAPTER V

DEEP in the heart of Surrey, on the edge of Walton Heath, and at the gate of that wild loneliness which is the joy of the millions who defile it, stands a house of no great age. It is called "Marengo." Round about it lie grounds, some twenty acres in extent (of which two at least are gardens and shrubberies) wherein the speckled laurel luxuriantly grows, and from the depths of which the copper beech and other ornamental trees not infrequently protrude. To the doors of "Marengo" (which is set back some yards from the road, but not so far as to shut off the cheerful prospect of modern traffic and the enlivening sound of horns) sweeps an avenue or approach of gravel large enough to admit two motor-cars abreast; and there are two gates, but no lodges. The house itself, to be perfectly honest, is of red-brick tile-healed on the upper story; the roof, however, has been tamed and verges upon brown. Moreover, that roof has dormer windows—but the woodwork is of Norwegian pine.

Now this mansion was (and is) the residence of

John Charlbury, Esquire, J.P., the partner of the Honourable Charles Terrard in the firm of Blake and Blake, Brokers, on the London Stock Exchange. He was unmarried, just on fifty years of age, and bald. He was short, he was square, he was stout; he was decided, and somewhat lethargic. He was not ill-natured; he had cunning little pig's eyes, which would have warned off the most innocent of men at fifty yards, but which were evidence of a very useful talent when they could work behind the screen of correspondence, so that the victim could be caught unawares.

It is related by travellers that the great tawny lion of the Atlas, though the vainest and therefore the stupidest of beasts, has at least the sense to associate with creatures very different from himself. The jackal discovers his prey, and a small bird hunts the parasites on those parts of his integument which he cannot easily reach with his muzzle or paws; the sword-fish is accompanied by a very different friend, small and bearing a lamp wherewith to guide him through the dark depths of the sea; and the very rich, themselves innocent of letters, will furnish their households with poets, dramatists and even philosophers of whatever calibre they can retain in bondage.

Now so it is with the best of businesses, with the most successful houses of affairs.

He does not advance the farthest who attempts to advance alone. Rather do they go farthest who associate with some other, utterly different from themselves, so that each may bring into play activities of which the other is incapable. Of such a sort was the alliance between John Charlbury, Justice of the Peace, and the Hon. Charles Terrard, nothing—not even B.A. The latter might be compared to the delicate rod line and fly; the former to the gaff and net. Terrard could go where Charlbury could never go; Charlbury could discover in the market, opportunities which Terrard would not have dreamed of. The supplemental character of their faces and their friends was paralleled in their souls. For just as Charlbury was short, bald, fat, square, elderly, and pig-eyed, while Terrard was tall, lithe, young, and marrying such innocent blue eyes to such an innocent mass of happy curls; so Charlbury knew most approaches to the soul by avarice or fear, while Terrard was familiar only with those attached to vanity, debauchery, and the customs of the rich. Charlbury conducted from the base in the City, while Terrard skirmished in the West—and between them they

were doing very well: were the firm of Blake and Blake, known to the gods as Charlie Terrard but to men as Old Charlbury.

Deep in the heart of London on the edge of that Square Mile of the Very Rich who are the delight of the millions they defile, stands a wild patch of loneliness known as "The Paddenham Site." It is some acres of abandoned ground worth—it should be—sums untold: but none will buy.

A Hospital had stood there once. It had gone to the country. Its former site should have been snapped up. It was not. For a year, and another year, and another its weeds grew, and grasses covered its uneven hollows.

It had been bought at last, to re-sell; mortgaged; foreclosed on; sold at a loss to resell; sold again at a loss. Thus twenty years had passed and now the last mortgage holders in their Broad Street Office were grown desperate. Who would hold the Baby? There was a fine commission for whomever should introduce a purchaser; and Charlbury had bethought him of John K. Petre.

It was not long after settling day, upon an evening late, when Charlbury sat in the drawing-room of "Marengo," surrounded by all things consonant to himself, and awaited his partner. He heard the

coming of the car, he welcomed Terrard and furnished him with a drink. He asked him whether anything more had been done about getting John K. on to the Paddenham Site purchase: and he reminded his blue-eyed partner of the healthy little commission; of the eager anxiety of Williams on the edge of disaster after such extreme delay, of the people in Broad Street panting to accept the bare necessity.

Now, here, to hand, in John K. Petre, was the chance; the heaven-sent eccentric chance.

"You've spoken of it to John K.?" asked Charlbury.

"Not yet," said Terrard. "I thought I'd wait until I'd seen you."

"Have you seen *him* since?" said Charlbury.

"No," answered Terrard. "I thought it best to let it stew a little—eh? He looked sideways at his partner, a little nervously. That partner was staring at the fire. "You see," added Terrard, "he's one of that funny kind. Quite empty to look at. . . . Nothing behind his eyes. . . . Might be grandpapa." Charlbury nodded slowly at the description—he had met that kind before, and he knew how their vast wealth had been garnered.

"I was right not to rush him?" Terrard concluded

anxiously. Charlbury continued to nod slowly at the fire. Then he gave a guffaw, roaring out:

"So you don't call that 'rushing,' eh?" and he chuckled hugely, putting a familiar hand on Terrard's knee to emphasise his enjoyment. "Two days after 'e landed, rushed him for Touaregs," and he chuckled again, "and it's 'ardly a week yet!"

"Well, but . . ." went on Terrard, still more nervously, "I told you I hadn't seen him again. I thought I 'd see. . . . But you know I 'm for acting all the same. . . . I don't think he minds. It is certainly 'yes' or 'no' with him, and we have all heard what he is, though we haven't seen him."

"You 've seen 'im," sighed Charlbury—he was faintly jealous of his young partner's opportunities; for in his heart he nourished secret ambition, and he saw, far off, a day—distant but bound to come before he died—when he should himself emerge, laden with gold, into the great world.

"Yes," answered Terrard snappishly, "I 've not seen him till just now, and then only once. We 've all *heard* of him and his lunacies. He 's capable of vanishing at a moment's notice, without telling any one."

Charlbury nodded again, and said more softly and musingly:

"You 've told 'em in Broad Street that you 've someone in your eye?"

"Yes . . . but I gave no name, 600,000 is what 'll fetch 'em."

Once more Charlbury nodded. He had heard that figure.

"Make it eight," he said briefly.

Then there was a slight pause.

Charlbury spoke again:

"What 's the way to tackle him—about the Paddenham Site, I mean?"

"I should put it straight out," said Charlie. "When we 've got it clear, between ourselves, I should ring him up—this very evening—and make an appointment for to-morrow."

"There 's nothing to get clear," said Charlbury. "It 's a straightforward proposition. He will bite, or he won't bite."

"No," said Terrard slowly. "But what I was thinking of was, how it ought to be put."

Charlbury was all decision.

"I tell you it 's straightforward. Put it that it 's a lock-up: that it 's a lock-up for one that can afford it, but precious few can. Tell him it 's

not a lock-up for a lot of them together, because it 's got to be kept close and tight, and that one man 's got to bide his time and take his opportunity. Don't 'ide anything from 'im. Tell him it 's been empty the best part o' twenty years—right in the 'eart o' London—and tell 'im plain it may be five more—that there 's Gawd knows 'ow much in it—at least, that 's my judgment, honest. I 'd do it myself if I could . . ." and he sighed. "I did try to persuade old Vere," he shook his head sadly. "But he died—the old fool died."

"Shall we say we 're in it ? " asked Terrard.

"Better not. No good telling lies. Besides which, commission 's enough. And we can't wait years, and ye can never be *quite* sure. If anyone 's got to bear the racket, let 'im. 'E 'll be quit of us long before then ; though, honest, mind you, I don't believe there 'll be a racket to bear, any'ow."

"Very well," said Terrard simply. He looked at his watch. It was only a quarter past ten. "I 'll ring up now," he said.

"Is that sife ? " said Charlbury, showing anxiety for the first time that evening.

"Quite, I think," said Terrard, who was on his own ground. "If he 's not out anywhere alone—for he 's keeping to himself, I 'm told. He would

think it ordinary to be rung up at this hour," and he picked up the telephone and called up 8309 Embankment.

There was nothing heard but the slight sound of the good fire in the room, and in that silence both men had but one thought, or rather had before their mental eyes but one picture. Each of them saw a figure. It was the figure of a commission. And it was a sound one.

At last came the tiny squeaking of the instrument upon Mr. Charlbury's ears, and he looked round and watched Terrard. That young gentleman was saying in an easy, happy voice :

" Oh, Mr. Petre, I 'm sorry to ring you up at such an hour, but I want you to have the news as soon as I could possibly get it to you. I am sure you won't mind when you hear" . . . " No, not at all." . . . " Thank you very much. It would be easier to put it by word of mouth. It 's a thing called the Paddenham Site. I have just heard of the chance. I could tell you all the details if you like. Can I see you to-morrow ? . . ." " Yes, certainly. That will do perfectly. Can you lunch ? " . . . " Very well, then, just before one, and I can tell you all about it before we go down. It won't take long. Then after lunch I could show it to you.

Not that that means much, but later we might go round to their lawyers and see the papers." . . . "Thanks. All right. 12.45. Go-o-o-o-o-d night." Charlie Terrard said the last words in the exact inflection given to them by the more refined of the wealthy women, and hung up the receiver. And Charlbury thought in his heart how useful a thing it was to have a partner with such an air of the great world—and yet how bitter.

There was one thing more to be done: to write a note to Broad Street telling them that they might expect a client introduced to them by Blake and Blake. It wasn't sure: but they might.

Terrard would ring them up, if it matured, at short notice, and he would let them know when to expect him.

The note was written. Charlie took it up to town that night and got it into the post just on the stroke of twelve.

* * * * *

At about twelve o'clock in the morning of the next day Mr. Petre was walking slowly along the Embankment, looking at the tide that rushed past and communing with his own soul. It was a breezy, sunny, spring day. The water was alive, and London had half forgotten its native misery.

It was an air in which new thoughts and clear ones should naturally come to a man; but none came to Mr. Petre. He was pondering upon that interview which he had to face, and went round it in his thoughts, coming no nearer to a centre, but still remaining as he had been since the blow fell upon him, attendant upon Fate. It was to be about some horrid business called the Paddenham Site. It might be—he dared to hope!—that some words would be used which he should understand. It might be that those inimitable talents of his, which all seemed to accept, would return to him — but at the bottom of his heart he doubted it. It was in no very happy mood that he returned to his rooms and awaited his guest.

But men in those moods are compelled to abrupt decisions. It is the only escape from their torture, and to such a second decision was Mr. Petre led upon this enormous occasion.

Charlie Terrard came in all breeze and happiness, with a dancing light in his honest blue eyes—I had almost added, in his honest curling hair. He seemed ready to talk of anything but business, and he came to business only as a little tedious frill, necessary, and soon to be dismissed. But when he got it out he was clear enough, and he explained the matter

"Exactly. I quite understand."

with a fair concentration, leaning forward to Mr. Petre across the table and making his points distinctly with just that touch and gesture which helps such a catalogue.

"It 's about a bit of land called 'The Paddenham Site.'"

Mr. Petre sat beside him, leaning back a little in his chair, and wearing that look which he himself felt to be a betrayal of complete incapacity, and which all who met him and knew his name (but none more than Charlie Terrard) revered as the mask of financial genius. Indeed, a sudden terror seized the young broker at the thought of his own audacity, but he conquered it and went ahead.

"The Paddenham Site: yes, the Paddenham site. That 's the official name for it; or rather, the official name for it is Turner's Estates and Paggles' Addition, subject to the order of the Court—but I won't trouble you with all that," he said, as Mr. Petre, hearing these terms, very slightly moved his head as one experienced in all such things. "You won't hear it called that," went on Charlie rapidly. "What people *call* it, you know, is 'That waste space where the Hospital used to be.' Quite young people nowadays mostly just call it 'that funny big waste space in Paddenham

Street,' because they can't remember the Hospital. I can't remember it myself. At least, I was a child when they pulled it down. And look here," he said, putting a greater intensity into his voice, "I have got first of all to tell you the drawback."

What drawback, or why, or what it was all about Mr. Petre could not have told you under threat of torture. Therefore he looked still more solemn, and slightly emphasised the movement of his head, as one who was taking it all in and glancing with eagle eye over every opportunity and every disadvantage.

"You know it 's been standing like that for more than twenty years?" Here, as in a special effort of heroic falsehood, Mr. Petre quite distinctly nodded, and Terrard was relieved.

"I 'm glad you know that," he said, "because it 's the very first thing to get hold of. *Why* a site like that should stand empty in the heart of London all the time it would take a very long time to explain to you. It began with a quarrel between the two estates, or rather between the Trustees of the Paddenham Estate and a claimant who had bought up an option on the addition; or rather, we won't say a quarrel, but what each called obstinacy. And then there was the bankruptcy, you know:

old Elmer's bankruptcy—the Elmers are Paddenhams. A lot of small people were rather badly hit, because there was a syndicate."

Mr. Petre was in up to his middle, and as the meaningless words flowed on he began to nod more vigorously than ever.

"Exactly," he said. "Exactly. I quite understand."

"Then, when the second syndicate took it over, they got the option of a price which seemed nothing at the time—but that was just before the London Traffic Bill. The fight over that held it up, of course, and then after the compromise . . ."

"Yes," said Mr. Petre, "of course," as though that explained it all. (What compromise? his dear heart asked of him—and an inward voice replied, "God knows!")

"If the Government hadn't been nibbling at it," went on Mr. Terrard rapidly, "they wouldn't have hung on, perhaps. But they did, and there was the second bankruptcy. Then Williams came in. You know what *that* means?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Petre, with a knowing smile.

"Williams thought he had got it for nothing. But still it was all he could do to meet it, and he certainly covered it; but he could not meet it alone."

"No," said Mr. Petre in judicial tones. "No! Naturally!" and Terrard marvelled at the man's familiarity with the details of a distant land.

"In a sense Williams has got it still, but he can't hold. It 's cracking — you can hear it cracking."

"I shouldn't wonder," laughed Mr. Petre joyously —it was astonishing how quickly these things were coming to him now when once he warmed to them. "I shouldn't wonder."

"Now, the question is this. When people are desperate like that, and have to let things go, they 're watched, aren't they?"

Mr. Petre said nothing. He smiled another knowing smile.

"Well," continued Terrard, "they 've watched a little too long. And *if* someone came in *now*—I don't think it would be less than £800,000—it might be a little more . . . but if someone comes in *now*, while Williams' tongue is hanging out . . ." Mr. Petre saw that tongue and oddly visualised the unknown Williams in the shape of a large dog panting and athirst—"he gets it!" concluded Terrard triumphantly, striking the table gently but sufficiently with his open palm. "He gets it. And then it 's whatever you like. Doubling it might

be too much, but it can't be less than a fair margin of 60 per cent. when it does go."

"I see," said Mr. Petre, getting up and pacing slowly down the little hotel sitting-room and back again. "I see." For, like the blind man in the story, he didn't see at all.

"That 's the trouble," said his guest, leaning back in his chair as though he were relieved by the conclusion of the tale. "It must be one man, and one big man, for they 're all shy of it are the little ones. And it must be one man because it will have to be handled briskly at both ends."

"Yes," said Mr. Petre rapidly, "at both ends."

"Buying and selling," said Terrard.

"Obviously," said Mr. Petre.

There, at least he was on firm ground. So much was clear. If somebody bought a thing someone else must sell it. It was a relief to understand one thing, anyhow, in the rigmarole. He halted with his back to the light.

"Besides which," said Terrard, "you don't want to be bothered with other people. I know you 'll take it or leave it, and I wanted to put it before you now and at once. I don't know if you 're following our London site-values, Mr. Petre? No doubt you 've handled such things in your time?"

"It is very good of you," said Mr. Petre. He was miserable within; he felt himself being led on, but what he dreaded most was an agony of doubt and delay; for he saw himself arguing and re-approached and his other ventures quoted. If once he allowed the series to accumulate upon him one pressure and question after another, suggestion following suggestion, in the end he would be corralled and find himself right up against that fatal day when his awful riddle should be published to others before he had solved it himself. A man's judgment in such suffering is that of a thing hunted, unbased, perhaps instinctive, at any rate precipitate; and Charlie was astonished to hear the words solemnly and simply pronounced by the standing figure at the window, who looked at him with a sort of forensic severity.

"Well, Mr. Terrard, you have convinced me."

"Mr. Petre, Mr. Petre," said Charlie Terrard in the agony of his relief and the whirlwind of such expectations suddenly realised. "I am undertaking a great responsibility! Do not be rushed on account of what I have just said! I do not pretend for a moment that there is an immediate market. I do not believe there is."

"No," said Mr. Petre, sitting down again. "No.

Quite so," as if it were the smallest matter in the world.

"But the mere fact that your name—if you will allow it to be known, *after* the transaction . . . Well, you see, it would mean a great deal. They would take it for granted that you were going to build, or at any rate they would know that you hadn't done it without knowing what you were at."

"Nor should I," said Mr. Petre coolly.

"Of course not," and Terrard laughed nervously. "No. Naturally. Well, your name, you see . . ." He looked at his watch. "Shall we go and see the place now, or after lunch?"

"Come down and lunch with me," said Mr. Petre —he felt it was the least he could do under circumstances so grand. "And we could go and look at it afterwards."

Terrard excused himself a moment, to buy a paper he said. And so he did buy a paper; but he also telephoned to Broad Street. Then he returned to his millionaire in the Louis Quinze grill room of the Splendide.

They lunched. They proceeded. And Mr. Petre gazed for a good ten minutes on sodden grasses waving in the wind, tall weeds and dirty stalks, and broken palings; the poor abandoned acres of

bare land lying there doing nothing, with the enormous wealth of London all around. It was like seeing a hole in the middle of the sea, and wondering why the water did not pour in and flood it; wondering why the huge appetite of London did not snap up such a morsel, why the jostle of London didn't crowd that vacancy with London once again.

It was an odd ritual, this looking at the nothingness of the Paddenham Site. It might just as well have been foregone. But Terrard was not wrong in his psychology. Looking at a purchase discussed is the beginning of possession, and as they walked away and Terrard explained, amid the dodging of the traffic and the crowds, the importance of a rapid decision, Mr. Petre was prepared for the next step. They picked up a rotor taxi and were crawling towards the City.

As they went Charlie explained their goal. In the office they were bound for they would meet the man who could treat for Williams—for the Vendor: and he had full powers.

Charlie knew what they would take. He repeated to Mr. Petre frankly that less than 700,000 was no use, but that 800,000 would fetch them. They wouldn't dare stand out for more. All that was

needed was plain speech and no haggling: take it or leave it.

In a large, very dirty room that looked out through dirty windows upon a court off Broad Street Mr. Petre was solemnly introduced to maps, to abstracts, to memoranda, to as many papers as would have taxed in so brief a time the brain of the most practised at conveyance. But he took the onset solidly, and Terrard, standing at his elbow, a little hard spectacled man who was doing the honours of the treat, and a busy clerk who came in and out with new papers as they were needed, and withdrew those done with—all secretly agreed, each in his own heart, that they were dealing here with such a brain as they had never met before.

Mr. Petre had such a way of spreading a parchment and holding it down firmly with both hands while he mastered its contents, of peering at the smaller details of a plan, of smiling sardonically at illegible pencillings in the corners, of copying into a pocket book chance details such as "not $5\frac{1}{2}$—$8\frac{1}{2}$" and "This must be corrected by comparison with No. 10"; he had such a rapid fashion of putting aside what he chose to regard as insignificant (though they might have thought it essential) and of delaying upon little things which they had disregarded,

but which he for some deep reason of his own would closely examine, that they were impressed as they had never yet been impressed; and the hard little man in spectacles, silent upon nearly every other experience in his career of purchase and option and foreclosure, would recount in his later years over and over again to whomever would hear, the strange happenings of these two hours. For two hours only were taken up in the great decision.

A line of memorandum was written, initialled, and signed; and Mr. Petre went out into the fresh air hooked, securely hooked, on to the Paddenham Site, and liable, morally liable, for rather more than £800,000 and frills. The man Williams, all witless of his happy fate, was saved.

Terrard took leave at his office door, and Mr. Petre, crawling back westward again in a taxi to his hotel, suffered what is known as the reaction.

He sat for the best part of an hour in his room, turning over in his mind the madness, the enormity of the thing he had just done. It rushed in upon him suddenly, like a fierce animal springing from the brake upon a traveller, that he had not realised —it had been too sudden—the affair of the £73,729 16s. 3d. He was living in a whirl of dreams. The reality of that solid sum now loomed upon him.

It was jeopardised. It might go like smoke. Then with infinitely greater force, with a thud like a battering ram, came the consideration that he was by way of meeting a sum the like of which was fantastic beyond the powers of any but one man in millions. Under the deadening blow of that fairly obvious discovery he reeled back into the consolation which he had already found on that day, not so long past, when he had ordered with perfect simplicity in the corner of Berkeley Square the purchase of fifty-thousand barbarous things called Touaregs of which he knew not anything at all. He remembered the fate of that blind action of a moment. He trusted to the same good fortune. And there returned to him that odd consolation which he had felt on that first day. What if the whole thing crashed? He was only where he was before. Would a man standing as he was be held responsible? His conscience told him yes, but the Law?—He knew nothing of the law in the matter.

And then . . . if he were really all they thought he was (and they seemed to know) he might be able to raise even so vast a sum. . . . But how without discovery of his dreadful secret?

It meant the revelation which he dreaded, at the worst; but that at the worst would come anyhow.

At the best (and, after all, it was one chance in two), his fate would be postponed.

His disturbed and blinded heart was the lighter for this confusion of thought so ending, and he exercised what power he had over his own thoughts to drive from them all anxiety. He knew one way in which it could be done. He had tried it already. He left an abrupt message, as he had left one those few days before; he noted the date when he was pledged to return to the city, and he departed by the very next train he could catch for his retreat in Hampshire.

The playful Demon attached to Mr. Petre's fortunes grinned to himself and acted. He it was that thrust a spear into the heart of a certain minor official of the Education Department.

He was a poet in the truest sense of the word; a creator, was that minor official. They only paid him £750 a year—from which income tax was brutally deducted ere ever he touched the cheques — he lived a bachelor and alone in Clapham. But the Spirit bloweth where it listeth, it does, and it had inspired this isolated man.

Long ago this minor official of the Education Department had been inspired to save England.

It was a vision; a revelation; it had struck

him in one blinding flash that what Elementary Education lacked in all our great towns and especially in London was a Central Physical and Civic Training Ground and Development Premises; what was soon briefly known under his energetic propaganda as a C.P.C.T.G.D.P.

That was three years ago; all that time the great idea had grown. Lady Gwryth had taken it up with all her might and so had her sister. What an ideal to realise! Miniature ranges, swimming baths, large airy gymnasiums, acoustic theatres, Greek plays and, above all, Dromes!

A new life open (in relays) to the children of the poor, and that in the very core of London!

Only the Treasury blocked the way. It did not definitely oppose, but it looked askance at the proposed expenditure. For the County Council could not add more than 2d.

The Demon suddenly stirred that minor official with the sharp decisive conviction that his moment had come. And, indeed, it was Primrose Day.

Therefore, much at the same time that Mr. Petre was sitting there in his room, wrestling with gloom and consolation, before his flight to the isolation and refreshment of Southern England, that minor official had jogged the memory of a superior; that

superior had determined to approach the Permanent Secretary once more with his mighty scheme; and the Permanent Secretary, before the office closed for the evening, had determined in his turn that the thing must be done now or never, and had gone himself (for all his glory) to the House of Commons, and had bearded the Secretary of State in his room.

Therefore it was that when, the next day, Mr. Petre was relaxing in the happy vacuity of his beloved Hampshire a brief note came by hand to the hard little man in spectacles in the dirty court off Broad Street, and that individual found himself summoned to the big palace in Whitehall; the Education Department had at last made up its mind to buy.

It had been told (as perhaps three hundred other possible purchasers had been told) that the site could be got for a song, the song being perhaps 2d., perhaps 2½d., upon the insignificant rates; or, if the worst came to the worst, a mere pimple upon the Budget. And after all, they had delayed too long. They had heard it, as all those other possible gulls had heard it, in every form of approach —at dinner, in the street, by letter, by write-ups in the Press, even through the personal eloquence

of Mr. Williams himself. No one can say as a rule what it is that moves a public department at last to act, or what power fixes the moment; but in this case we know the agent: it was the Playful Demon.

The hard little man in spectacles heard with impassable face the demand and the project of his Sovereign—for, as we all know, Ministers are but advisers to the Crown. And as the scheme unrolled before him, his accurate, well-trained mind, immeasurably experienced in such things, was running up figures and attaching to the sum upon which at last it settled, that happy margin which would fall to the office in Broad Street when all the rest of the pack had torn off their share.

Provisionally, very provisionally, protesting that he had no powers to act; protesting that he could not speak for his principals; protesting that it must be put before others; he stated—oh, so provisionally—a bedrock sum (in round figures, of course, only round figures); and the Department, which had been well salted, was astonished to hear that what it hardly expected much under three millions was obtainable—provisionally of course, it was a mere estimate, there was no authority—for not so very much more than two.

CHAPTER VI

ANYONE who has engaged in the sale and purchase of land knows what a long business it is; but no one was in any hurry in the matter of the Paddenham Site. On the selling side there was a happy conviction that delay increases appetite and a fine faith in the staying powers of John K. Petre. As to the buyer, if indeed His Majesty (through and with the advice of that Secretary of his who happened for the moment to preside over the Board of Education) should have the good fortune to acquire the Paddenham Site, there was no need to betray violent hurry whatever eagerness the Department might be repressing in its gizzard. After all, it was other people's money, and not a salary in the Department would be increased by a farthing, however advantageous the deal.

What did push things forward a little was the appearance in the market of an Anonymous Benefactor.

This excellent man proposed in a letter to the Public Press to purchase the Paddenham Site as an

Open Space for the People, a new Lung for London. And he would stand the racket.

It was astonishing—considering he was anonymous—what a lot the papers had to say about him, and how loudly they praised his truly British generosity. From my own insufficient experience in these matters I should say that, counting one thing with another, the noise need not have cost more than £500; but it had the effect of thousands. There was opposition too. There were angry letters of protest against the object of the proposed benefaction, a sheer waste of land; but there were warm letters of approval from the public also, and there was even one very solemn communication, in which the Anonymous Benefactor gave it to be understood that the sum asked by the Paddenham Estate (for under that guise did Mr. Petre move, or rather Mr. Petre's kindly friends) was satisfactory; and though it came to far more than another site which had been suggested, the central position was essential to it.

The Great Unknown remained a complete mystery. Those fantastic fools—happily few in our sane English world—who are for ever imagining vast conspiracies and deep-hidden plots, whispered that Messrs. Blake and Blake knew too much about it.

They suspected even such absurdly innocent and obvious encounters as Charlie Terrard's dining twice with one Editor and three times with another —as though in that world people did not constantly meet. They remarked that when Charlbury went off to France for a short holiday the excitement waned. In a word, they indulged in the maddest surmises and even affirmations. It was well for them that they did not print their libels. For our Courts of Justice are never more severe than in the due punishment of such monstrous defamations of well-established people.

The Department was not slow in discovering the sum which the Anonymous Benefactor was prepared to pay, and indeed were told all about it by many mutual friends of the Minister and the Anonymous Benefactor. It is the pride of our civil servants that they will do a job as thoroughly, without the incentive of private advantage, as any man of affairs would do for profit. And though they were not so basely impertinent as to seek who the Anonymous Benefactor might be (and after all, that was immaterial), they did find that he would be prepared to go to the neighbourhood of three millions.

Now another adviser of His Majesty—no less a

person than the Secretary of State who looks after expenditure, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (or to be strictly accurate, the young man who did all the hard work for the third of the Permanent Officials in the Treasury) — had marked one and a half millions as the very limit. There was a difference of one hundred per cent., and it did look for a moment as though the Anonymous Benefactor would have a walk-over. For he was evidently a man determined on his object, and apparently one of those sudden modern apparitions with visions in their heads and quite incredible sums in their pockets.

That £750 poet in the Education Department, who was keenest on the whole affair, the man who years before had started the idea of the C.P.C.T.G.D.P., the man who had already erected in his imagination all that mass of acoustic theatres, baths, miniature ranges, and above all, Dromes, through which the children of London should be passed in myriad relays (there also on great screens the ravages of alcohol upon the human body should be depicted in novel and more striking form), the man whom Providence had raised up to save our little ones and do Mr. Petre that exceedingly good turn, was distracted at the sudden peril of losing

the Paddenham Site. It would be a cruel thing if his great dream were never to be realised!

Now this same humble individual had come, through Lady Gwryth, to know everybody — an excellent form of knowledge even in an educationalist. In the serious drawing-rooms a counter-offensive developed against the Anonymous Benefactor.

It was as well; for had the Anonymous Benefactor had it all his own way, it is terrible to think what would have happened to Mr. Charlbury, to Charlie Terrard, to the hard-faced man, and to all the host of little people who were ready for their pickings. As for what would have happened to Mr. Petre I dare not think of it. But at any rate, the Anonymous Benefactor, that mysterious, gigantic figure, lost the throw. After a good many questions in Parliament, two speeches and the threat of a Commission; after a joke or two in the Revues and on the Bench, a passionate protest from the *Morning Post*, a bleat from the Anti-Communist League and a fierce howl from the absurd Taxpayers' Union, all the general routine of such affairs—the Paddenham Site issued an august communication in its turn and announced that it preferred the good of Education to its miserable pocket.

There was a very fine leader indeed in the

Messenger, which I have myself cut out and keep framed before me upon the wall of my study, to cheer me when I come near to despairing of my fellow-men. His Grace (for it was His Grace who inspired that leader, though he did not actually write it, because he could not write consecutively), pointed out that such things only happened here and in America, and that they were characteristic of the Nordic Race and of the modern man of affairs; that the sacrifice was Idealist . . . a peak. . . . But, indeed, I have no space for it all; at any rate, that leader in the *Messenger* was calculated to lead to some later friendly relation between the Duke and Mr. John K. Petre; and would inevitably have done so, as the Duke intended it to do, had it not been for the fact that Mr. Petre suffered from so uneasy, so insane a panic, which grew upon him with every passing day.

He would meet no one. He refused to go out into the great world of Dukes and Gwryths and their sisters. He hid.

While these negotiations were toward he had, as may be believed, fled from the Splendide; for once more, less than a week after his return, he had seen Mephistopheles—only the back of him—striding towards the bar. He had taken refuge

in the omniscience of Charlie Terrard, and Charlie Terrard had found him rooms in the Temple under the convenient name of Patten. Henry Patten was painted on the door and Mr. Petre was at great pains to remember it. There for the moment he could feel a little more secure. Charlie Terrard had suggested, indeed, how pleasant it would be if they could share a flat, but Mr. Petre already appreciated the world in which Charlie Terrard moved, and he was about as inclined for that arrangement as a devout spinster in a country village is inclined for appearance upon the stage with song and dance.

He lay low. He visited his Hampshire lair continually. He prayed for peace—but how could peace come to a man who had lied so freely in pursuit of it?

The weeks went by without incident. He had signed what papers were put before him; he dreaded abominably the day when he would have to sign something else: when he would have to sign for money which was not there and to pay sums more than tenfold the capital at his command. But that day never came.

Incredible as it may seem to you, my chance reader, and to all those million sisters of yours

who with so much difficulty earn real money which they pay in real form, across real counters, for food and permission to live, incredible as it may seem to professors of political economy, there is such an operation as selling without buying, and that blessed paradox was put in operation by Mr. Petre's Guardian Demon with the greatest ease.

It was, to be accurate, upon the 17th of May that at last a letter was signed which bound the Education Department in bonds of iron—nothing as yet negotiable, but a sure and certain pledge of completion; and that bunch of honest fellows Terrard and Charlbury and the hard-faced man, and I know not how many of their merry hangers-on entered into the fulness of their joy. Some even borrowed on the strength of it, for they were pressed; therefore did the Banks come to hear of it, and among others the Branch Bank where Mr. Petre's huge current account, still well over £73,000, lay idle or rather earning money at usury for others.

The only man who had not heard the final news was the obstinately secluded Petre. He was in Hampshire again, lost; and none dared seek him. Anxiously did Terrard await his return; but when he did come up to the Temple, a few days later, it was too late in the evening for business.

Next day Mr. Petre sought the Bank early in the morning to draw a casual cheque for his trifling personal expenses (he was still a little nervous, but he was getting accustomed to the place), the young man in horn-rimmed spectacles with a face like the moon asked whether he could possibly see the Manager. Again a hairy terror passed through Mr. Petre's being. But he nerved himself, and once more did he tread the carpet of that corridor, once more conducted by the leader of souls who had conducted him those weeks before; once more did he pass the three engravings; once more did he find the presiding godlet of the place, and there was still a fire, for May's a bitter month and the Managers of Banks are sedentary men.

For a few moments he did not speak. He looked on that extraordinary man to whom seventy odd thousands were as small change, and who left such a sum on current account as your common lord leaves a rickety overdraft of seventy.

What doom was to fall upon him Mr. Petre knew not; but the face of his host reassured him, for though it was full of grandeur, as befitted his station, it was not malignant. It was even kindly, though its owner took care that it should not betray

too great respect which he felt for such a client's presence.

"We have all heard the news, Mr. Petre," he said, when they were alone.

Mr. Petre gulped. *He* hadn't heard any news!

"I congratulate you, Mr. Petre. It was a bold move."

"Mr. Petre inwardly agreed that it was—not to say temerarious—and the word "congratulate" relieved him, but he said nothing. He only smiled profoundly.

"I need not say that we are entirely at your disposal for any operation in connection with all that will follow?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Petre in tones the firmness of which surprised him. "Certainly." Though what it was that might follow left him bewildered.

"I should imagine everything will be settled before the end of the Session, eh?" continued the Master of Credit, or rather the high servant of those who are the ultimate masters of Credit.

"No doubt," said Mr. Petre. "Yes, probably. In fact, obviously." Then there was a silence.

"Well, Mr. Petre, I only asked you to be good enough to give me a few moments in order to put that before you. Ah! It is for you to judge."

It was indeed! The Manager knew, as did all his world, the exceeding eccentricity of the millionaire, and dreaded to the last extremes of dread lest one chance word should lead to the sudden withdrawal of his favours.

"It is not for me to suggest it, Mr. Petre," the voice went on, "but there is a large sum standing idle, Mr. Petre, a very large sum. And of course when this purchase goes through it will really be a very large sum indeed. . . . A much larger sum," he added with a futility worthy of a better cause.

"Yes," said Mr. Petre, catching a vague impression that there would undoubtedly be a very large sum indeed doing nothing, and in his name. His manner confirmed the impression that however large the sum it would pass through the same hands: and the Branch Bank was very pleased. It spoke and said:

"Government departments aren't given to hurrying themselves, are they? Ha! Ha! But you must be glad they've made up their minds at last!"

Then Mr. Petre began to understand, though none too clearly. It seemed he had been saved again.

He saw the white beard wagging, he heard the voice continuing, in a new, persuasive tone :

"Ah, I don't know, Mr. Petre, whether you have considered . . ." and here the Manager pulled towards him a large publication with an elaborate cover, "whether you have considered the Magna Development Scheme ? We think highly of it here, Mr. Petre. To tell you the full truth, the issue was made through us, and to be perfectly frank, we are ourselves engaged in the matter. I am not free to give you other names, but some of them are public property, Mr. Petre, public property. You will know them as well as I do. They are names to conjure with, Mr. Petre."

He put on his spectacles, opened the elaborate cover, and looked over sundry pictures and curves, printed on that fine hand-made paper. He held the document so that Mr. Petre had a glimpse of photographs showing a beastly foreign land parched under a hellish sun, with blackamoors about. There was a map with rivers in blue, mostly dotted, and interrogation marks upon the everlasting hills. There was a portrait of a bounder in a pith helmet. It was revolting. The Manager was about to urge further arguments when there happened in Mr. Petre's soul a surge of emotion for which he could

not himself have accounted; perhaps it was his weariness and disgust with this successive business of blind actions. He might on a closer analysis have discovered that it had something to do with a new confidence born of the turn that this last blind action had taken. But I think it was more the effect of those photographs and of the pith helmet man. At any rate, that Ironic Spirit at work, to whom for a brief span the life of this distracted man had been given as a plaything, moved Mr. Petre's mind to a pronouncement. He said with the same decision he had used a month before at Mrs. Cyril's luncheon party, when first he had engaged upon that path which had led him so far: "I won't have anything to do with it." He was surprised at his own abruptness.

The Manager looked up sharply. Mr. Petre was gazing into the fire, his face averted, and for half a second that face was inspected as closely as a face can be. The Manager decided that Mr. Petre was beyond him—and there the Manager was right.

"I must wait," Mr. Petre had almost added, when he checked himself. Why should he tell any of these people anything? He hated these Magnas. He hated the sunburnt wastes and the blackamoors. He wanted to get away. One thing he was

determined on : he wouldn't give reasons. That way catechism lay and in catechism exposure, and the end of all. He repeated doggedly : " I have made up my mind not to touch them ! I won't touch them ! I won't have anything to do with them ! "

" Certainly, Mr. Petre, certainly," said the Manager. " I quite understand. But you will let us know if anything . . ."

" Of course, of course," said Mr. Petre, whatever the devil " anything " might be.

" Well then, my dear sir, it is quite understood, is it not ? I need hardly say that you may draw upon us with perfect freedom," and he laughed, a conventional laugh, as though the thing were too absurdly obvious to need saying.

" Yes, oh yes," said Mr. Petre. His host made the slightest movement to rise ; Mr. Petre took advantage of it, and rose himself to go. Indeed, he was in such haste to go that he left his hat behind him, and the Manager with a human gesture followed him almost quickly, and handed it to him before he got to the door. Mr. Petre thanked him, shook hands quite warmly and was gone. He went so fast that the conductor who acted as usher or dog for so great a man only just caught him up at the end of the corridor and bowed him out. And

as he went out at top speed through the main building to the great swing doors of the Bank he was followed by fifty pairs of eyes from behind the grille which divides the Priests and Acolytes of Finance from the profane, and one man and another by pairs exchanged short sentences upon the judgment and the power and the glory of so many millions.

Mr. Petre could not escape, what no man can escape, the influence of his activities, even though these activities had been thrust upon him. He had fallen, alas! to looking at the financial columns of his paper. It had become a daily habit, though he was doing nothing with those regiments of names and figures; therefore on the day after his visit to the bank parlour his eyes caught the words "Magna Development," and he read what they had to say. It seemed that Magnas were moving. It did not read like a puff, it read like sober chronicle.

There was the new report, and as he read it a faint breath—oh, a mere zephyr—of the Holy Spirit of Business, which he so gravely lacked, ruffled the surface of Mr. Petre's soul. But the scent of that fetid air nauseated him. He read the prices as a decent man reads, from a kind of itch and against his better instincts, the exploitation of the gallows

by our great modern Lords in their newspapers. He reads: but hates it the more as he reads. Till at last he burns the rag.

So felt Mr. Petre as he watched Magnas moving.

When a big thing moves it does not move like Touaregs, that flighty Gallic-African stock, it moves as moves the mighty Pachyderm; in a solemn ascentional surge like a herd of elephants breasting a hill; it moves as a great volume of water might move, as a tide flooding into harbour. So moved Magnas all that day, and I cannot conceal it from you that Mr. Petre went so far as to buy an evening paper at what I might call the close of play; he had not looked at a tape as yet—and, indeed, he never came to that. The interest was momentary; the disgust permanent. He soon relapsed into his fixed mood of anxious inward searching, and when buying and selling obtruded themselves they were soon swallowed up in that repeated torturing riddle the Sphinx had set him. Who am I? Who are mine?

That same evening he was to meet Terrard in order to hear the last details of the Paddenham Site scheme, and they were to dine together.

It was all very well to defend himself with isolation, but he had been too lonely, and so long as they dined

where no one could see them he was glad of companionship. The dinner was in his own rooms; small, simple and bad. After the meal Terrard said to him casually, "What do you think of Magnas?"

"Don't mention them!" Mr. Petre answered angrily. Terrard looked up astonished. He had never heard that emotion in Mr. Petre's voice before. But, indeed, that excellent man was overtaxed. He had a feeling of being driven, a feeling that if he was to do anything more he would do it on his own. He had had enough.

Charlie Terrard obeyed the implication and was silent; then talked of other things. He gave him the date when the whole of the Paddenham Site affair would be wound up, and the Government money paid over. He asked him whether he would care to look at the figures. Mr. Petre sighed, said he would, meaning that it had to be done; but how willingly he would have foregone the task! He said it vacantly enough, for indeed he was weary of the thing, now that it had come to fruition, and not even yet had he grasped the full meaning of that enormous affair. Rather did his mind continue to dwell on Magnas, like an ache; and while Charlie Terrard was putting scattered sheets out upon the table with sundry jottings upon them in

pencil the older man was wondering whether he could not be rid of all, now that his future was more than assured. With the end of the session—when the end of the Paddenham Site purchase had gone through—he would bolt and be at peace. Till then the less doing the more his chafed soul was eased. This and nothing but this occupied that poor afflicted mind, even while Terrard was trying to call his attention to the vast sums before him.

Mr. Petre made an effort, looked wearily at the pencilled marks, and grasped the figures they conveyed, but not their social meaning.

"There is the nett," said Charlie Terrard, and he pointed to the scribbled, but legible seven figures. "That of course is after deducting your purchase price, plus the commissions and stamps and all the rest of it; only from the balance, apart from the frills you have got to take, of course, what Bannister's bill will come to, and then there are the 1932 duties, as we call them.

"Yes," said Mr. Petre blankly.

"So with what the completion will have come to, and what this Government purchase comes to, and the stamps and the rest, the total is here. That is where you stand on it," and Mr. Petre read

with weary eyes the pencilled marks which meant £1,032,405 8s. 10d. He did not add to it mentally the lump that remained out of the original £73,000 odd. He did not contrast that original lump with the very much larger lump that would be through by August when Parliament had risen and the deal had gone through to its last detail; he simply saw the figures, and he was tired of them.

"It 's just possible," said Terrard, "that you may be questioning some of these items," and he pointed to another litany of figures and frowned intelligently. "Now this little separate batch of deductions . . ."

Mr. Petre waved him off; he was not questioning those deductions, or anything else. They were the pickings that the crowd had made—out of his money; and they were welcome. He nodded solemnly as one item after another was ticked off for him—commission this, commission that; expense this, expense that; and travelling and printing and advertising. He heard Terrard's voice concluding after the litany:

"It might have been simpler to put the whole thing down in a lump and then give you the details for inspection; but I thought you would like to see all the items." And poor Mr. Petre said "Yes," though he would willingly have given ten shillings

or even a pound to be free of the bother and know simply that it was—what was it? He looked again, £1,032,405 8s. 10d. He continued to nod mechanically as the pencil went on ticking off. Terrard had expected no opposition; he knew by this time the strange mentality with which he had to deal; yet even he was surprised. I am sorry to say that in his heart of hearts he wondered whether that litany might not have been swelled and the pickings increased. Indeed, they might have been for all Mr. Petre would have cared.

Terrard, dealing with the mere record of such wealth was not fully in control of himself. The pencil trembled; but as for Mr. Petre, I readily believe that if the conversation had concluded by Terrard's telling him that some hitch had prevented realisation after all, and that this vast sum had vanished, his mind would have remained unchanged.

"Would you like to keep the notes," said Terrard, "or shall I have a copy made of them?"

"Oh, have a copy made of them," answered Mr. Petre carelessly, as he said good-night, "and send it along when you like."

Terrard, as he went slowly down the stone stairs, his hand upon the ancient iron railing of that ancient Row, was absorbed in this further question:

What was Petre up to in the matter of Magnas? Why such a prompt rejection? Why so violent? He stopped twice on his way down to try and think it out. He decided that probably the old fox was buying under some other name. He came to a determination that, high as the stock had gone that day, he would be the first on the market to-morrow.

In the rather sombre Bloomsbury house which the Manager of the Branch Bank honoured with his habitation that same question was proposing itself for submission, and the brain that dealt with it had come to a conclusion not very different. So emphatic a declaration could only mean that Mr. Petre had not yet bought Magnas, or why crab them? But certainly he was about to buy—or why crab them? He smiled as he thought of the different tale Mr. Petre would be telling people about Magnas on the morrow. Therefore, said the Manager to himself, he had been wise to buy more Magnas himself, as he had done, the very moment Mr. Petre had left his parlour. He was justified; we know that Magnas moved all that morrow. Their rise confirmed two men—and more—in their admiration of a genius who could marry the commonest tricks to unheard rapidity and daring.

Dada Beeston (Dorothea Madua, second and younger daughter of Henry, 10th Baron Beeston, of Beeston Abbey, Beeston, Rutlandshire; and of Desirée Waldschwein, his wife).

The following morning Charlie Terrard bought. Magnas were still moving; not blazing, not soaring, but comfortably going up and up with dignity and precision. And so they ought; for the report was true and the position sound; and for five days the thing went on, and after that, though the pace slackened, the rise slowly continued. Then a halt. Distant in space, each knowing nothing of the other, two men had one thought: Terrard and the Manager each grasped with subtle perception that the old goat Petre was cautiously beginning to sell. They also sold. That moment was followed by a slight fall, and then another halt. But Terrard had not touched them again. He had made a nice little packet. Charlbury, I fear, had neither bought nor sold, for Terrard had had no occasion to speak to him. As for the Bank Manager, he also wisely abstained. Each man as he took his profits wished ardently, but with a useless curiosity, that someone could tell him how, and in what amount, and through whom, the eccentric millionaire had acted, and what *his* profit had been. But the eccentric millionaire, the old goat, the fox, was otherwise engaged. He had fled for silence to the chalk uplands, worshipping the spring and drinking in the morning.

* * * * *

When a little later one of his innumerable hostesses had taken Charlie Terrard aside, and had implored him to tell her what Petre was doing ("You are the only man who knows," she had said, archly, damn her !) Terrard with a look of too much wisdom had protested that he didn't know. When the private deal in Magnas was over and the general appreciation of the stock and the benefit it had produced to the house he served was discussed in the Bank parlour, the Master of that place smiled meaningly at his subordinate and said that Petre was a curious man. And the subordinate had smiled back, and both of them in their hearts very firmly believed that they had laid bare the secrets of that mighty heart.

* * * * *

The summer and its London season rose to their climax through June and into July. The end of the session approached. Mr. Petre was less and less to be seen. Three splendid attacks by Mrs. Cyril failed ; the third with heavy loss. A forlorn hope led by a First Secretary's wife, issuing from the American Embassy, was cut off and wiped out to the last woman.

Mr. Petre grew a shell. He was the despair of Terrard.

That young gentleman was happy enough all the same, and so he ought to be! The dogs also get the crumbs that fall from the table, and considering the scale of his intelligence, he was a lucky dog. He rode in the magnificent car which the Hooter people had forced on Mr. Petre with two chauffeurs and garage complete — to the huge discomfiture of the Paramount people, who spread the perfectly true rumour that it was a gift for advertisement. He moved into a very sumptuous flat. He got engaged to Dada Beeston, who had refused him fifteen times. She had thought better of it; he even promised to introduce her to the Midas and to turn her own dross into gold, which was beyond his power. He floated on a sea of Petre. But Petre himself had grown invisible. Terrard saw him frequently enough, putting all his business through and winding up the Paddenham Site affair. But that was not enough. Terrard wanted to display the animal; he boasted of him. All the smart women regarded Charlie as the keeper. They pestered him with their invitations. They put down the silence and absence of the millionaire to some scheme of poor Charlie's own, whereas poor Charlie was dying to trot him out. But whether it was that so incredible an access of fortune had in some way

strengthened him, or whether it was that long strain had turned him inward upon himself, Mr. Petre was adamant; he would not move. He took the air solemnly when he was in town in the Temple Gardens an hour a day; and even so, passed back and forth in short stretches to keep his eyes on the dangerous human species and be ready for immediate flight. And Charlie Terrard knew that it was as much as his place was worth to disturb him then. Long intervals he spent in his country retreat, where his old false name still held and where he was secure. Yet even here his accursed fate pursued him. He had now taken the rooms at the inn by the year, and the landlady, treating him as a god, could not but gossip and wonder; for why should a man to whom money seemed to be nothing bring his splendour beneath her roof? When he found that she had gossiped he did an odd thing; he paid her an astonishing percentage and told her it would cease on the day when he heard that the gossip had been renewed.

So even in that tiny Hampshire village all tittle-tattle about the man was stopped dead.

Terrard did not dare reveal Mr. Petre's Temple address and name to the hunters. Mr. Petre had succeeded in making himself of his own volition

in his new life what apparently he had made of himself in his old life : a man entirely remote from mankind, inaccessible, unknown.

For all his researches—and he had tried desperately and well—told him no more of John K. Petre than all the world knew. And at times he caught himself wondering whether indeed he were he.

Go back and inquire in the States themselves he dared not. If here in England questions were to be fled—what would it be there ? Come, he would wait. Some day in a flash his soul would return to him.

CHAPTER VII

THE Session was drawing to its end. The Paddenham deal—which Gowle, in that fanatical sheet of his, called "The Paddenham Scandal"—had gone through. Many had thought of putting up some opposition against it in the Commons, and all had given way at last—for the sake of the children, Mrs. Fossilton assures me.

At the Branch Bank more than a million pounds sat looking foolish, still on current account, and its guardians were living in a perilous Paradise.

July had not long to live (nor the Home Secretary either for that matter, though he was in crude health, for he was destined to fall off the Matterhorn that very coming August—but I digress), when the Daemon played a trump and presented to Mr. Charlbury's patient but ingenious fancy one more good, great and thumping Petre deal. For John K. Petre was the master of American Rotors—and the opportunity lay patent. Mr. Charlbury long wondered why he hadn't thought of it before. But the Daemon knew why.

* * * * *

The Rotor has come to enter into nearly everything that a man sees, and does, to-day. The last generation, that of the Great War, never dreamt of it. Ours will remember how it came, first in the modest form of a toy with an outlandish name, and put upon the market in London and Paris by the Japanese. Then there were two or three years of experiment, with occasional newspaper paragraphs, and Lord Winnipeg's unfortunate venture in which Saillant and his crowd were mixed up—I am afraid the Frenchman got the better of it. But, anyhow, it was wound up within eighteen months. Then there were two years in which the only advertisement the new thing got was a crop of popular jeers.

The Rotor was already driving our heavy vehicles and pretty well all our large merchant vessels. The Navy had taken it up before anybody else. It was beginning to do part of the domestic work, especially in the new underground flats, where it could be fitted in the first digging without the change over that is necessary in the old-fashioned over-ground houses. It was beginning to be used for private cars, though no one had yet started a fleet of taxis with it in those days. I am speaking of 1948.

Somehow or other none of the many companies connected with the new discovery could make good. The work was there all right; it was the profit that seemed to misfire.

For one thing the theorists and the busybodies had tinkered with it. Those people (prominent everywhere in local government) who have read too many books and have not seen enough of life, talked of "reserving for the community" the "future possibilities of the Rotor." That frightened off investors. Then the London County Council made most absurd regulations, hampering the commercial development of what already ought to have been a universal form of power.

The provincial towns were hopeless. Birmingham coolly went into the Rotor business on the rates, and even hall-marked a particular type of Rotor which it thrust upon all domestic users and manufacturers in the town. It did worse. It let out the smaller machines at a price which barely earned 4 per cent. on the cost and quite killed commercial competition. Manchester was nearly as bad. Glasgow and Liverpool were not far behind in their half-socialist absurdities. The only northern community of any size which acted with common sense in the matter was Pudsey, which had the

"One had chosen Public Service, the other—Affairs."

distinction of being the first English town to leave private enterprise completely free in this matter. But the southern residential towns, and especially the watering-places, are, as everyone knows, in a much better tradition; and the Rotor companies paid fair dividends in these sections: especially Brighton, where Sir Charles Waldschwein was the presiding genius of the enterprise.

But everyone surveying the figures for the whole group of connected ventures would have shared the gloom of that great scientist, in his way an eminent business man, Lavino (an Englishman, in spite of his name, or rather a Welshman) who prophesied openly at the Cardiff inaugural that the Rotor would never pay, and yet had the patriotism to join the board of the youngest of the linked companies.

It seemed as though some odd fate prevented the chief new instrument of our new time from reaping its due commercial reward.

What changed all this was the taking of the whole thing in hand by two men of genius, Henry Trefusis and his brother, both of them sons of a Hamburg merchant who had come to this country in early youth, married here and established the great firm which is known under his name. The

brothers had chosen different paths in life, the one had preferred Public Service the other affairs. But when Henry first began to set in order the finance of Rotors Charles, though not neglecting his political duties, could not but take a certain interest in the boundless opportunities offered.

It was but three years before Mr. Petre's unfortunate and inexplicable accident that the first amalgamation took place. Everything had been straightened out by the amazing organising power of the younger Trefusis, and though the new enterprise, taking in the whole British field, had not yet turned the corner by the end of 1952, there were already being prepared the last two necessary steps without which no great modern public service can function properly : a public charter and a concealed, but effective, monopoly.

The small and hopelessly mismanaged competing interest which the Saillant French group still controlled in this country were bought out on very favourable terms about ten days before the shocking suicide of Saillant himself, which, as the Frenchman had chosen to commit it in the middle of St. Paul's Cathedral at the most solemn moment of the Memorial Service for Lord Winnipeg, could not be kept out of the papers, and is fresh in the minds of the public.

What still hindered the final successful establishment of Rotors under a National system was the network of local companies and conflicting sectional contracts, of which nothing but an Act of Parliament could compel the purchase and settlement.

The elder Trefusis had felt a very honourable scruple in directly promoting such a measure; he left it in the hands of his two most intimate associates in the Cabinet. But there was no doubt about the Bills going through, especially as it could not, of course, be submitted to public debate; it was quite unfitted for treatment of that kind, dealing as it did with a mass of scientific particulars and equally technical and difficult financial details, which a large assembly is quite unfitted to discuss.

It is true that Lord William Mawson, who had been a director of the old Saillant wreck, put down something on the paper which might have led to a discussion at some impossible hour of the night towards the last days of the session. But luckily so futile an intervention was rendered impossible by his Lordship's appointment to the little-known post of Sub-Controller of the Chains and Liveries: a coincidence worthy of the good fortunes that have

latterly attended the Trefusis scheme in all its activities.

Briefly what was proposed was this. (1) The moribund existing companies—or such as could not see their way to amalgamation—were to be compulsorily bought out at a price to be fixed by judicial award. (2) The whole mass of obsolete local contracts now hampering Rotors should be codified under rules imposed by the Government; not only the efficient working of what is now a public interest, but the simplification of its management, made such a new policy necessary. Maximum charges for the use of power and for the lease of machines and meters were set down in the same instrument. The Trefusis brothers were pleased that Mr. Justice Honeybubble should preside over the award. The drafting of the rules was in the hands of a loyal committee whose chairman was Arthur Cannon. In such hands business men could be certain that all the reasonable claims of Henry Trefusis and his company would be safe.

All this was plain sailing: the real difficulty lay in the point of arranging a virtual monopoly.

Old prejudices die hard; and there lingers quite a respectable body of opinion, especially among our older public men who can remember the last days

of King Edward VII. and were born in those of Queen Victoria, which has an unreasonable horror of monopoly unconnected with public ownership. Of public ownership there could, of course, be no question; that fad had, thank Heaven, been destroyed at the polls by an overwhelming majority of votes when Mrs. Fossilton's party had gained its majority of thirty-six in a full House over that of her brother-in-law, Mr. Cowl. It was as certain as anything could be that the English people would never revive the old dead socialist formula of nationalisation. Indeed, the last stronghold of that nonsense, the road system, was already in private hands, and the various branches of the postal service had followed the telephones, and had been given out to private contract half a dozen years ago. Only the northern municipalities still played with the moribund fetish of public control.

On the other hand, it was difficult to see how any effective competition could be established in the particular case of the Rotor; the nature of its transmission of power, the necessary standardisation of the instruments, the existing strength of the Trefusis interests, all seemed to forbid it.

There were not a few upon the Board (and it included the best brain of them all after Trefusis—

I mean Mary Gallop) were for letting things stand, with the codified B. O. T. rules as a sufficient sop to the constitutional Puritans.

The Company was in such a strong position that no competition, they said, was to be feared. To establish anything like a serious rival would have meant millions, not only in the comparatively unimportant point of buildings and plant, but on the political (and social) side as well.

And who was likely to enter such a field with Charles Trefusis in the Cabinet and a close group of his political friends associated with him in the high patriotic interest of Rotor development?

But the majority of the Board, and even Henry Trefusis himself, inclined to make things somewhat more secure. The difficulty was turned by the suggestion that, after the present Bill had gone through, and British Amalgamated Rotors could feel themselves reasonably safe for the future, The Admiralty, War Office, and I.A.F. should enter into contracts to purchase their material from the English Company to the exclusion of all others for at least thirty years; and as this would establish the standardised machines and their power in the ports, in the Imperial air transport system, and in all functions under the control of the Government,

" He used to think in three figures ; he was now thinking in five."

especially the Harbour Entries and new Public Wharfage, a virtual monopoly would follow. For it would be difficult for any hypothetical rival—and it seemed impossible at this time of day that such a rival should appear—to establish any permanent service; acting as he would be under an inability to link up with the public uses of what would soon come to be known as the official Rotor system. For instance, how could a boat make harbour in a difficult channel at night under a different and competing system controlling the rival patents? It could only pick up the guiding-ray with a Rotor attuned to the shore Rotor. Or how could the elevators (to take but one small detail, but a detail which applied to hundreds of ports throughout the British Empire) link up with termini in the holds unless both were on the same system?

Certain fields, notably the recently launched Tidal Power areas and their supply Henry Trefusis decided not to touch. He doubted his power to capitalise so vast a new extension. On the other hand, he would not leave them in being as dangerous competitors. He would use his political connection to kill them, as railways had killed canals. Then indeed his monopoly, the monopoly of the British Amalgamated Rotors, of "B.A.R." would be secure.

Such were the prospects of B.A.R.'s in this month of July, 1953, when Mr. Petre, rather perhaps by good fortune than by the talent which his contemporaries so freely ascribed to him, had just banked (and left on current account) the ready moneys of the Paddenham purchase.

* * * * *

In "Marengo," at breakfast, all alone, sat Mr. Charlbury. Opportunity breeds opportunity, and discovery discovery; and the Daemon found a fruitful soil.

If anyone had told Mr. Charlbury three or four weeks before that he would pull off an amazing scoop in Touaregs and then, on the top of that, walk off with an enormous commission (come, to be accurate, two enormous commissions) on the Paddenham Site, he would have thought himself in fairyland.

But by this time he had already come to take such things for granted. He used to think in three figures; he was now thinking in five: and of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

If no brilliant scheme had illumined his life before Mr. Petre had so strangely blown into it by the really unexpected door of his partnership with Terrard, it was not because Mr. Charlbury

lacked initiative, but because habit had put him upon a certain road whereon to exercise his initiative, and he had never been led to consider larger things. He had shown plenty of initiative quite early in life in the matter of a row of cottages near his father's shop, and he prided himself—out of a hundred other successful ventures—in the purchase of Mrs. Railton's interests after the divorce and the subsequent sale of them to Mr. Railton. But to-day he had risen into another sphere, and what had moved him at this moment was a paragraph of half a dozen lines in small print coming at the end of a column in his daily paper.

The column had dealt with the enormities of the Polish People, and had threatened them with the vengeance of the journal if they continued to trample upon the rights of an oppressed German-speaking minority. Mr. Charlbury had as much patriotism as any man, and was free to indulge in hatred of all Poles, but the little paragraph at the foot of the column interested him in another fashion.

At a public indignation meeting of the ratepayers of Loosham a resolution had been unanimously passed condemning the new provisional licences issued by the British Amalgamated Rotor Company, and a committee had been appointed to draft an

alternative, which upon completion was to be submitted to the Board of Trade. This resolution, he remembered, followed upon a somewhat similar resolution passed by a considerable majority at a meeting at Paxton the week before.

Moreover, at Loosham, as at Paxton, there had been passed a *unanimous* resolution against the compulsory purchase of Locals.

It was a paragraph that meant nothing to the millions that had seen it that morning. It appeared in several papers as a piece of unimportant general news. It meant little more than nothing to the Directors of Amalgamated Rotors themselves, they had expected a few such meetings—but it inspired Mr. Charlbury with a Great Thought. He pushed his chair back from the lonely breakfast table, screwed his little pig's eyes closely together and gave this Great Thought elbow-room within his mind.

A few more such meetings? Eh? A number of them? Eh? Then virtuous indignation in the Press. And if the Press were too frightened of the Trefusis brothers, why then the purchase of a great Daily, eh?

It would cost money. But there was a man available with limitless money. He was called John K. Petre.

He looked at his watch. He would soon be taking the train to his office.

Mr. Petre stood in the consciousness of Mr. Charlbury as does revelation in the consciousness of the new convert; as does the beloved in the consciousness of the new lover; as does the sunlight in the consciousness of a man cured suddenly of blindness; as does life in the consciousness of a man reprieved from immediate death. He was flooded with one supreme conviction: that in and by and through Mr. Petre all things were possible. Mr. Charlbury grunted to himself and took the train to town. During all the forty-seven minutes which it took the powerful new Rotor engines to cover the fifteen miles between Epsom and Victoria, his Great Thought threw branches and leaves and burgeoned amazingly.

When he reached his office he was annoyed to find that Charlie Terrard hadn't yet turned up. He never did turn up before the middle of the morning; but to-day Mr. Charlbury, who was at business on the stroke of ten o'clock every day of his life (except Sundays and a month's holiday at the seaside) felt an unusual irritation at so usual an absence. For the Great Thought needed Charlie Terrard, and it needed him at once.

When that young gentleman did come in he was not happy; he was even less happy than he usually was in the middle of the morning, for his night had been happier far; and Mr. Charlbury, watching him with some inward contempt, but remembering his mundane connections with some inward awe, wondered whether he were fit to receive the instructions—or let us say the proposals—which were to be his task.

But he did not wait long.

"Charlie," he said, "you know that man Petre?" It was rather a redundant question, but Charlie nodded wearily.

"Yes," he said.

"Well," went on Charlbury slowly, "if he takes up Rotors . . ."

"How do you mean, 'takes up Rotors'?" said young Terrard irritably. "It's not worth our while to make him lose a little packet over what all the world knows. Rotors have seen their best. Bailey tells me he believes Trefusis is selling privately."

"What I mean," began Mr. Charlbury.

"What you mean," broke in Terrard pettishly, "is that when the Bill is through and the damn-fool public come to hear of the Public Services Contract Rotors will go to $5\frac{1}{2}$. . . . Well, they won't.

Young Mr. Cassleton, growing acquainted with the World of Affairs.

They 're over-priced now. All that 's discounted. They were $4\frac{3}{4}$–$\frac{7}{8}$, offered by whoever it was that was selling them the last thing yesterday, and they won't fetch that again, so there. After all," he added, a little ashamed of himself for showing any heat over so small a matter, " that 's good enough in all conscience ! They were 2s. 6d. before Trefusis and his gang came in. £35 odd for your quid isn't bad, even for Trefusis, these days : Harry Holt 's wife made forty odd thousand, and Holt left the Government, took a directorship in it."

Mr. Charlbury heard him out, his contempt increasing, but his awe at the mundane connections remaining fixed. " Nothing to do with that, Charlie," he snapped. " Listen to me. *If the Trefusis crowd think they 've got Petre up against them* . . . eh ?

Charlie Terrard opened his mouth foolishly, like a man recovering from gas. " Up against 'em ? " he repeated mechanically.

" Yes," said Mr. Charlbury, beginning to show a little temper this time, " up against them."

" But he isn't," said Charlie Terrard simply. " Petre isn't up against them."

" Of course he isn't, idiot ! " answered his partner with fine equality. " Not yet. But you can make him, can't you ? "

"Make him what?" said Charlie, who was really too stupid this morning: but then it wasn't fair to tackle him before twelve; he always thought so much better after twelve.

"Look here," said Charlbury, folding his arms on the table, squaring his jaws and planting two gimlets of eyes into Terrard's own. "Don't you know that Petre means Rotors in the States?" Charlie nodded. He saw light. "Well, what you 've got to do is to put Petre up to doing something on this side. Put him up to a *British* scheme in Rotors on his own. Put him up to having his name in it anyhow, and *then* you 'll hear Trefusis sing! That 's when the Anthem will rise! They 'll have to make it a combine; they couldn't stand against him! He can carry us all on his back. He can swallow us and not know he 's had breakfast! *Now*, have you got it?"

Yes, Charlie Terrard had got it now. "They would have to get new capital or reconstruct or something," he began slowly.

"Oh, leave that to them," shouted Charlbury, "leave that to them, for God's sake! They know their way about! All they want to know is that Petre 's up against 'em, and they won't be up against Petre long. They 'll be arm in arm with the enemy before he fires."

"It wants thinking about," said Charlie Terrard.

"It does," said Charlbury grimly, "I 'll do the thinking."

And he proceeded to do so. And as he unwound the tale his young partner stared and marvelled and at last grew wise in one more chapter of the wisdom of this world.

First came a few words on Trefusis's false security, his certitude that nothing could come in to touch his monopoly.

Then came suggestions for a few more meetings—they, Blake and Blake, would find the few hundreds for that—no need to worry Petre. He might kick at details.

Then came talk of letters in the Press, write-ups; indignation growing—only, not overdone. Enough to frighten Trefusis; not enough to queer B.A.R.'s.

After that Petre could strike home.

Mr. Charlbury described the John K. Petre position in American Rotors. He described the plant and the huge works at Theocritus, Mich. He described the ignorance of these magnates on our venerable constitution, with its connection between public service and private enterprise. He described with holy glee the faces of Trefusis and his brother and young Cassleton, their skirmisher hearing

that the vast concern had thought of crossing the Atlantic; if necessary of starting a paper to take advantage of the growing grumble against the new licences. He described the effect of fifty millions acting in opposition to the proposal for permanent Government contracts in the coming autumn. He described the salting of the smart women and the private secretaries and the News Agencies. He described the necessary haste of the Trefusis crowd to come down off the shelf, to take the robber to their arms, to arrange, to settle, to go fifty fifty, to save their souls alive. He described how he and Charlie would come romping in for a touch on both deals—from the victor in his triumph, from the vanquished whom Charlie could save. More commissions. All good!

Oh! It was all good!

And Charlie Terrard saw a great light and was filled with the true doctrine and confirmed and primed for his mighty work. He set out.

* * * * *

As Charlie Terrard climbed up the old stone stairs to Mr. Petre's rooms in the Temple his heart misgave him. He remembered the rebuff over Magnas, and though he didn't understand the motive or

the mood, he had noted that curious indifference which had spread over Mr. Petre's mind like a veil as they went together over the figures of the Government purchase of the Paddenham Site. It 's all very well to be a millionaire, and an American millionaire at that, and a fantastic American millionaire into the bargain; but you weren't going to tell Charlie Terrard that any living man was indifferent to something well over a million pounds.

No. It was some deep game! Something in the man which made him great, but which to Terrard, as to everyone else, also made him inexplicable. He had to propose to-day a deal upon a scale quite out of the common—far above the humdrum of the Paddenham Site—and he dreaded a scene. Besides which, Mr. Petre seemed to him to have got odder and odder in all these last few months, imprisoning himself absurdly. It made the young man nervous to think of it. But he had to face that interview, and he faced it. After all, the worst that could happen would be a refusal—even if it were abrupt they could leave the matter and talk of other things.

So mused he on those stairs till he came to the old dark oaken door and rang.

He came in. Mr. Petre greeted him rather wearily,

and they sank opposite each other into two deep chairs looking out into the gardens under the summer light—and upon his soul Charlie Terrard didn't know how to begin.

At last he said:

"Mr. Petre, I have never talked to you about your own interests in your own country." (Mr. Petre's blood already ran cold). "Honestly, I thought it would be impertinent." (Mr. Petre was far beyond any effective impertinence. Panic was the emotion which those few words had stirred in him. Good God! What was coming next? And how should he meet it?) "But I ought to tell you what people are saying. I mean," concluded Charlie firmly, "about your position in Rotor affairs."

It was an odd, hoarse voice that answered him. "What people are saying—eh, what?" Mr. Petre still kept his face too much turned away as he gasped out the words, and Terrard noted his hands grasping the arms of the chair.

"Mr. Petre," said Charlie quietly, "you are Jevons; he's only the original man; you're Jevons now and you're the American Rotor Combine."

"Yes," gasped the unfortunate man almost inaudibly . . . at any moment a direct question

would sink him. He prayed as no man yet prayed that Charlie would keep to affirmations which he had but to admit.

"Of course, the people who count know that you really control . . . Anyhow, they make certain you control—*I* should say you control," he continued, plunging boldly, 'The American Rotor Trust.' It 's a sort of commonplace with those who know, Mr. Petre, and I only mention it because it 's common knowledge, and to explain what I want to say next."

"Yes," said Mr. Petre desperately—it was the first he had heard of it. Then he added still more desperately, "I do. . . ." He added those words in his terror of the alternative, "I don't," which would lead to heaven knows what cataract of revealing blunders. Follow the lead, he thought, follow the lead; it 's the only chance. Therefore it was that he had confessed himself to be the man behind Jevons, whoever the devil Jevons might be, or whatever the devil Jevons was. Yes. All right. He, the victim of this torture, controlled the American Rotor. "Yes, I do," he added again, and looked down at the Temple greensward so tragically that he might have been confessing forgery and high treason and making a clean breast of it.

"Now you know, Mr. Petre," said Terrard, a trifle emboldened by the absence so far of a check, "it 's inevitable—I don't say it 's justified—but it 's inevitable under the circumstances—that they should think you 've come over on that business. I mean for or against the Trefusis crowd."

"Yes," murmured Mr. Petre inanely, like a parrot, "for or against the Trefusis crowd." Then with sudden intelligence and anxiety, "Who 's they?" he jerked out irritably. "Who 's talking about me and my affairs?" Terrard soothed him with a lifted hand.

"Oh, Mr. Petre, Mr. Petre, don't imagine for a moment that your privacy has not been respected! . . . I do assure you it has been. I only meant those who cannot but know your splendid boldness in the Paddenham business. After all, you know, there 's me, and there 's Charlbury, and the office —oh, there 's been nothing in print, but you couldn't expect the people who follow these things not to have heard a name, a mere name, Mr. Petre."

"Yes," groaned Mr. Petre dully. "Go on."

"Well," said Terrard, "as I say, they can't help thinking you 're here either with or against Trefusis and his lot. Certainly that 's what I thought— to put it plainly."

"Well," said Mr. Petre, "what then?"

Terrard pondered a moment, recalling the instructions of Mr. Charlbury, J.P. for the County of Surrey. Then he started off:

"Well," slowly, "the fact is," more slowly, "Trefusis is going about saying he must act, one way or the other." Mr. Petre's blood ran cold again. "You know the kind of man he is?" Mr. Petre nodded; he didn't, so he nodded—quite emphatically. "He 's like a rat. If he 's cornered, he bites." Mr. Petre nodded again, as though the habits of the mysterious Trefusis had been the study of his life. "But he 's frightened, Mr. Petre; devilish frightened. To put it plainly, I 've no doubt of this; that if he thinks you 'll meet him, and that you really mean business, he 'll come down. He 'll combine. He won't do anything—he 'll just take your terms—in reason. He won't take action."

"Take action!" gulped the distracted man. "Take action!" And in his heart he cried aloud to heaven for salvation. A certain malign Trefusis was—might—would take *action!*—oh! merciful God!—and all would be before the world!

"I said he *wouldn't* take action if you approached him," said Charlie, "and that I advise you to do. I advise you most strongly."

"You mean," said Mr. Petre slowly, as he gathered some wandering, foggy idea that there was an avenue of escape somewhere, "that . . . Mr. Trefusis . . ." he was glad that the "Mr." went down; it might have been Sir Ezekiel or Lord Trefusis for all he knew, "won't take action if he thinks that I . . . ?"

"Yes, exactly," said Charlie, impatient at such play-acting, but restraining his impatience. "If he knows that you're bringing your thing over here against him, he'll take it for granted you've marked him and he'll die game. He'll attack first. If you approach *him*, that's another matter. I tell you, he'd come right down and feed out of your hand.

"Ah!" echoed Mr. Petre, "if I approach him, yes; if I approach him, he'll feed out of my hand."

"He knows you might even start a paper—and that would sink him with the grumbling that's going on. He knows of your campaign in the States, Mr. Petre, and your—I mean Jevons'—purchase of the . . . the . . . what *was* the name of that paper . . . ?"

Charlie's inquiry was honest enough, he knew the name of that great American organ, but he couldn't

recall it for the moment, "You know, Mr. Petre, the . .? . . the . . .?"

"Oh, Lord!" thought Mr. Petre, "oh, *Lord!*" He would say anything, do anything to prevent another such extreme of danger.

To his unspeakable relief Terrard babbled on. "Oh! never mind!" he said. "Anyhow, the paper did the trick. Yes," he continued, with a little half laugh, "the Trefusis brothers—they 've only got to know that you 're coming in and they 'll make their proposals all right. They know their way about." It was not an echo of Charlbury; it was a phrase that everyone had used of the brothers Trefusis, even in the old obscure days when the one had been hammered and the other had wriggled out of the police court proceedings over the cheque business. Men said "They knew their way about" in the tone of admiration due to such master minds. "All you 've got to say is that you 're quite agreeable to an arrangement with the Company as it stands, and that if they don't like it you 're out for an independent proposition. It binds you to nothing."

"No," said Mr. Petre (he understood *that* phrase at any rate, and a blessed one it was!), "it binds me to nothing. What were your exact words, by the way, Mr. Terrard? I mean that about the

present Company, and an arrangement, and the proposition? It was 'proposition' you said, I think, wasn't it?"

Terrard was used to pretty well anything by this time, but he did marvel a little at the affectation of simplicity in manner that was so admirably done. But the matter of it was surely extravagant.

However, millionaires must be humoured, and he fell in with the great man's affectation of not knowing the A.B.C. of blackmail.

"Yes," he answered, "that 's what I said."

Mr. Petre pulled out a note-book and a pencil. "Yes," he said. "Please give me the exact words." Terrard was getting a little frightened. This was really out of nature.

"Well, what I said was, 'All you 've got to say is that you 're quite agreeable to an arrangement with the Company as it stands.'"

"Wait a moment," said Mr. Petre, "not quite so fast, please. Yes, 'as it stands.' I 've got that down."

"And if they don't like it," Terrard went on, "you 're out for an independent proposition. It binds you to nothing."

"I 've got that down now," said Mr. Petre at last, reading it over to himself, ". . . proposition. It binds me to nothing."

"Yes, but don't put that last down," said Charlie Terrard. "It 's separate. The words 'it binds you to nothing' were only my comment."

"Very well," said Mr. Petre, shutting the pocket-book up and putting it back. "That 's a weight off my mind. And you said if I do that . . . I mean, if you let Mr. Trefusis know that I 'm ready to see him . . . he won't," he shuddered inwardly, "take action."

"That 's so," said Terrard. "That 's what I said." But he was almost as much bewildered as Mr. Petre himself. That such a man should act thus!

"Very well," concluded Mr. Petre with a vast sigh of relief. "Go and see them, Mr. Terrard, go and see them by all means. That 's what I want."

It was an astonishing way to deal with a huge commercial affair covering two continents; but Terrard knew his man too well by this time to spin out the interview. He was content to take his leave.

A few days later there was a large public indignation meeting against the B.A.R. Bill in Leeds. That same week half a dozen in the north and Midlands, and one, not very successful, in London.

Two papers timidly admitted letters. Gowle's

wretched fanatical sheet (what a Godsend !) began a regular attack.

A few days later again a careless conversation between Terrard and young Cassleton at the Benezra's ball had drifted, somehow, on to B.A.R.'s. Charlie had said casually that Mr. Petre had been talking about the future in front of Rotors over here, in England.

Cassleton saw Henry Trefusis on the morrow, and put up danger signals. Henry Trefusis refused to budge. Cassleton had grown eloquent. Trefusis had said it was talk—Terrard's talk, no proof.

Cassleton was the more convinced of danger.

Next day he met Terrard hurrying west : going to see Petre, he said. He 'd look into Bolter's at five. Terrard was telling the truth. He was indeed on his way to see Mr. Petre—and he saw him, to some purpose.

A little after five he was in Bolter's lounging by the side of the lounging Cassleton. They had talked for half an hour and more. Terrard had summoned the young genius, the Hermes of the Trefusis Jove, and had plainly put the thing before him. Mr. Petre, *his* Mr. Petre, wasn't over here for his health : He—the Rotor man. However, he was willing to come to terms. Terrard could

assure Cassleton of that. Couldn't the principals meet?

But Cassleton had bluffed. The surrender was not going to be as easy as Terrard had hoped. He told Terrard plainly that Mr. Petre was not in anyone's pocket, and that talking was only talking. He sneered that there wasn't a word in Mr. Petre's writing; not even a pencilled scrawl; there wasn't even a telephone message; there wasn't ——

"Oh, if that 's all," said Charlie Terrard with sudden vigour, "that 's easily settled. He sent for a messenger, sat down, and wrote at top speed:

"DEAR MR. PETRE,

"You will remember our recent conversations. I am putting it before them now. I wonder, could you let me have a line simply to say 'An arrangement with the present Company if they will, after an appointment with Mr. Trefusis; if he will discuss the matter with me. Failing this, an independent proposition.' It would be quite enough.

"Yours,

"C. T."

The messenger was told to wait for an answer.

Mr. Petre was still one of those who on receiving a letter answered it, such was his simplicity, such

was his happy ignorance of the world. When he had read that innocent note, of which the hand was the hand of Terrard, but the spirit was the spirit of Charlbury, he wrote his reply at once, straightforwardly as a man should:

"DEAR MR. TERRARD,

"Yes, that was exactly the way we put it, an arrangement with the present Company, if they will, after an appointment with Mr. Trefusis, if he will discuss the matter with me. Failing this, an independent proposition.

"Very sincerely yours,

"JOHN K. PETRE."

The messenger bore back to Bolter's that invaluable envelope. Charlie Terrard had spent the half hour in drinking with his prey as amicably as a brother. Mr. Petre's answer was given him by a Club servant. He just put it into his pocket, and for a few minutes more the two men, still settled down side by side, talked first of a cousin's accident in the hunting field, from that to new Rotor roads, from that to Rotors, and they had not been upon that dangerous ground for the space of three replies before Cassleton said, "You know, Charlie, Trefusis won't take any stock of this yarn of yours."

"I can't help that," said Terrard simply. "I did the right thing. I told you at once. You know what you 'd have thought of me if I hadn't; and if you won't meet Petre in time, believe me, so much the worse for you."

Cassleton put on an air of distress.

"It isn't exactly that, Charlie," he said. "You know as well as I do what I mean. Trefusis wouldn't say it isn't true. What he does say is that he takes no stock of it."

"Well, he 'll be selling stock pretty soon," said Charlie, as grimly as his easy voice could manage such a tone. Then he added: "Surely Trefusis knows what kind of a man Petre is?"

Cassleton nodded. "Oh, yes," he said, "everybody knows that."

"Perhaps everybody does *not* know it as I know it," said Charlie. "It is the amazing everyday sort of way that he does these things. He moves the price of a City like a man taking off his hat; he decides in five minutes."

"They 're all supposed to do that," said Cassleton wearily.

"Well, he *does* it," said Charlie with unusual emphasis, even sitting up slightly in the effort and then sinking back again. "Now you said just now

there was no writing, and you saw me write and you saw me get the answer. Perhaps you thought I 'd nothing to show you. Well, I don't know whether this means anything to you," he went on, pulling out the envelope. " It 's only a chance note, but you must be blind if you can't see the man through the few words," and he tossed Mr. Petre's innocuous, candid five lines over to Trefusis' lieutenant.

Cassleton looked with a languid eye over these five lines and restrained himself. It was getting hotter than he thought.

He handed them back with no comment at first : then — " Well, I don't see that makes any difference," he said, and broke off the subject.

Terrard had no reason for remaining much longer, nor had Cassleton. They parted with as little ceremony as they had met. Cassleton moved off without haste, hailed a taxi and was with Trefusis within half an hour. Terrard saw him well off, and then went to the box to talk to his office. Even as Terrard was telling his partner over the 'phone that there was nothing doing Trefusis was hearing from Cassleton that the thing was real and urgent, that his fears were realised, and that at any moment the mine might be sprung under his feet.

"How shall I get him, here? Now?" Trefusis had asked sharply.

"You can't," Cassleton had drawled out. "I can get Terrard if you like."

"Get Terrard," said Trefusis.

But by the time Cassleton had got the Club he was told that Terrard had gone, and when he got on to Blake and Blake he was told that Terrard had not yet come, but that Charlbury could speak to him.

"How long will Mr. Terrard be?"

"We don't know," said the voice.

"Tell him to ring up 4398 St. Martin's the moment he comes. . . . Tell him that it 's urgent," he ended, in the voice of a man who doesn't believe anything to be ever urgent at all. Then he put up the receiver and waited, saying nothing, while his master sat at the table looking through the walls and thinking furiously. The deep lines about Trefusis' mouth were heavily drawn and he was breathing a little more rapidly than was his wont. He turned to the table and made a pretence of writing. But if anyone had looked over his shoulder they would have seen that he was writing nothing, only scribbling the pen forward feverishly line after line to avoid the lifting of his head and the indiscretion of speech.

At long last the bell of the telephone rang. Cassleton was taking it up when Trefusis rushed to his side, took it from his hand and, even as he spoke into it, his eyes became so vivid and of such an intensity in them that the younger man, who knew him too thoroughly, was afraid.

"Yes," he said. . . . "No." . . . "Mr. Terrard?" . . . "My name is Trefusis." . . . "Very well, I will see you first if you will. My arrangements are almost complete." . . . "No, Mr. Terrard, I'm afraid it must be now. To-morrow will be too late." . . . "Very well, Mr. Terrard," and he put the receiver up again.

Of the two alone in that room Cassleton was the one who suffered the feeling of defeat. Through the brain of Trefusis was running the rapid chain of a new scheme for changing front . . . at all costs a combine, new capital, the public would take the racket; bound to . . . Did he stand to lose? to get less than what he had made sure of, even that morning? . . . Possibly. One must take the rough with the smooth. . . . There might have to be heavy sacrifice. . . . He would see. . . . But at any rate B.A.R.'s would be saved and the bulk of what he had securely grasped after that

long effort of building up British Amalgamated would remain in his hands.

"Cassleton," he said after a pause, "where would you like to be when Terrard comes?"

"You don't want me to hear?" said Cassleton.

"On the contrary," said Trefusis, "I do want you to hear?"

The eyes of the younger man wandered about the corners of the room. He smiled oddly at the cupboard which had played so famous a rôle in the Burton transaction, then he shook his head.

"No, my dear fellow," he said, with an odd and new familiarity towards such a master, "there are limits. Besides which, I hate stuffy cupboards."

"I wasn't suggesting you should hide and eavesdrop," said Trefusis angrily.

"I am glad of that," answered Cassleton. "One never knows! Witnesses are useful."

Trefusis nearly found himself saying "Take care," but he caught back the words in time.

"You needn't worry," said Cassleton, continuing in that familiar tone which surprised himself, "Terrard 'll talk to you before me, just as he would if I wasn't there."

"Well, there must be some record," said Trefusis, "and we leave it at that."

They had nothing more to say one to the other; each feared a breach, for each knew too much about the other. Perhaps the more powerful of the two feared it most. For now there were special reasons for hanging together, and those reasons became stronger than ever when Terrard was shown in, greeted Cassleton, and took his place for discussion.

That discussion was of no great length, the two sole motives which urge men in the world to which these men belonged, the motives of avarice and fear combined, were at work and acting with their accustomed command and power.

There was the less ground for delay when Terrard protested that he had no power to negotiate. He told them that he was but the mouthpiece of the principal. He could only repeat the message he had himself been given, that Mr. Petre was willing to transact; that Mr. Petre thought it common sense to transact; that if Mr. Trefusis would not transact, then Mr. Petre would not transact; but that if Mr. Trefusis would transact, then he, Mr. Petre, was free to meet him at any time or place he would, Mr. Petre being a free man.

Trefusis elaborately drew a five-pointed star with a pencil upon a piece of paper, tracing odd

curves about it, as he heard this simple statement of the position.

"Would Mr. Petre come here at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, Mr. Terrard?" he said.

"I have no doubt he would," said Terrard easily. "I will ring you up just beforehand, but I 'm pretty sure he 'll come round; he 's one of those men who never seem to have much to do." Here he rose to go. "Yet he seems to get a lot done somehow, doesn't he?"

"Yes," said Trefusis. . . .

Next morning at eleven Mr. Petre and Charlie Terrard were shown with some pomp into the room where they found Trefusis and Cassleton awaiting them. And one of those exchanges which determine the lives of millions in our modern democracy began between those four men, within those four walls.

There sat Henry Trefusis and Cassleton on one side of the table in the bare, vulgar office, and there sat Mr. Petre and Terrard on the other; Mr. Petre strained and ill at ease.

Mr. Petre said very little and said it oddly, as though by rote. Cassleton and Trefusis noted that manner, and agreed silently that our greatest men are the hardest to comprehend. Charlie Terrard

did most of the explanation and all the firmness in the intervals of his principal's silence. Terrard it was who laid down detail and clause, negotiated, insisted, yielded when he chose to yield. All Mr. Petre did was to nod and, now and then, in monosyllables, to agree. But Trefusis, fighting a losing battle, could see well enough which was master and which was man. He divined the reality behind the mask. Petre was the soul, Terrard the mere mouthpiece. Petre was the Captain of that day. . . . How marvellously did that great man affect tedium! How admirably assumed was the recurrent spasm of disgust when his eyes met Henry Trefusis' eyes!

It took less than two hours. And at the end of it there existed in duplicate a document not fifty lines long which left Charlie Terrard assured that Mr. Petre would stand as an equal God and twin master of B.A.R.

* * * * *

The victors went out. Henry Trefusis sat silent. Cassleton spoke to him, and could hardly get replies. At last the young man left in his turn, and the financier sat alone, not writing, not moving, pondering hour by hour.

He rang for wine and food; dismissed it; told

The Public discovering no small appetite for the Debentures at 8%.

the porter he should remain to work and that he was in to no one.

The long summer evening, benign, beneficent, went by. From the narrow court below came the shouts of children playing. The light drooped. It was almost dark before this man had concluded what is of import to such men.

A fool would have said that he and his politician brother had lost half their prospect of loot in the decision of the morning. But the Trefusis sort in our declining state are not fools in that sense.

One scheme was wrecked? He would build a vaster one—with the rumour of John K. Petre behind him. He had designed to leave apart the Tide Power Basins and to ruin them. Now, with this name behind him, he would change his plan. He would buy up and Rotorise them. He would catch the fool public with debentures: they should buy the tides for him and yet leave him master, and at the same time provide a wide support for his raid upon the wealth of England. He would rotorise Central Lighting in the towns. He would more than double the haul in which he had sacrificed half his share. He had lost a battle. He would win the campaign.

It was dark when his long thought was concluded. He went out into the warm night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Public came after those debentures very kindly, very willingly; as kindly and willingly as cows galloping into a new pasture. The Government Contracts were enough to make certain of that. The House had left them alone as a matter of course, and the Service Departments were thoroughly reassured; now that—as their controllers knew—the two great names of the Rotor world were working together.

The critics were voluble, as they always are; diverse, as they always are; variously ill-informed—and, in the issue, proved quite wrong.

Those who had said that there would be opposition in the House were obviously wrong; they didn't know what they were talking about; they were thinking in terms of an imaginary House of Commons long ago: old-fashioned academic fools like the editor (and owner) of *The City*, who had run in their groove for forty years and still talked of the "Constitution," "the Watchdog at the Treasury," "the great spending departments," "the power of the Purse."

Those who said the new purchase would be voted down at the General Meeting were ridiculously wrong. They hadn't even analysed the nominal holdings, let alone the real ones. The Locals got one hundred of the new fully-paid-up shilling shares for their old $4\frac{3}{4}$–$\frac{7}{8}$ sagging pound shares (with a 2s. 6d. call on them), and the new stuff was quoted at 112 within a fortnight. But after all, who were the Locals? When you dug out realities from under such names as the Imperial Adjustment Corporation, and Percival and Co., and Benezra Bros., who were they? Trefusis. There were a few hundred investors with tufts of fifty to five hundred, a few dozen larger insignificants, a handful of real investors (every one of them come in through the Trefusis crowd), a dust of little gamblers; all the rest were Trefusis—with Cassleton for his little necessary tail.

The new ordinaries, five million of them, were half and half: Petre (with Blake and Blake and certain appendages) stood for fifty per cent. of the lot, and Trefusis and his crowd for more than seven-eighths of the other half. And there you had it.

They could shake out the small fry and tie up the bundle to themselves any day they chose.

General meeting indeed! It was a walk-over—and enthusiastic at that.

Those who said the Public wouldn't take up the Debentures (and who pitied such underwriters as Honest Tim Hulker of The Needle-Filers, the working-man member for Parrett) were utterly wrong. They said it was the wrong time of year, with so many out of town; that no one would be such a fool as to make Trefusis a present of his own property at their expense. That debentures offered no speculative interest. That the debenture sum for buying out the Locals was too large altogether; that the eight per cent. offered was of itself a danger signal and would warn off even the worst fools: that for once Trefusis had over-reached himself.

They didn't know Trefusis; they didn't know the dear old Public; they didn't even know the time of year.

Profits are always in season. The Public is quite fond of eight per cent. Trefusis—to repeat the classic phrase—knew his way about.

But the people who were most hopelessly wrong were those who prophesied after the event. When the obscure army of placers had rushed to over-subscribe nearly three times over, these prophets

shook their heads knowingly and said, "Wait for the slump!" It never came. It is too early to be certain yet, perhaps, and nothing lasts for ever: but that debenture interest was paid at the end of the first quarter as easily as a bus fare; and the next, and the next; and any of the first-comers could sell if they liked, any time in the end of the second year, for a very nice little premium indeed.

* * * * *

On a day of that late summer, with autumn already in the air, the new Session and the Opening of the Courts not so distant, Trefusis reviewed his position.

He had thought on that blazing July morning that he was cornered. He had cursed inwardly and set out to save what could be saved. In the two hours of wrestling with Terrard (the silent, impenetrable John K. Petre looking on) he had envisaged some necessary loss. On the contrary, he had gained.

His hours of lonely scheming had borne fruit. On a much larger capitalisation his holding was less in proportion but it was worth more. So was his brother's. And he was fond of his brother.

His interest was worth more to-day than his holding in its original form—a good tenth more;

even allowing for that stiff present to Charlie—which gratitude for tolerable terms had rendered necessary, and on which, indeed, Charlie had insisted. Not only was he richer : he was in a rapidly growing thing—and the Public had paid. Nor were the Public wrong. For apart from the big Service uses and Tidal and Lighting and all the new Colonial and Indian contracts, the private use of the Rotor was suddenly expanding. The dealings in ordinaries didn't cover a fiftieth of the bulk, yet the price already stood close on one hundred and twenty shillings. And now—the inexplicable Petre left him wholly free ! Never interfered, hardly appeared. Yes. He had done well, had Trefusis. It was worth being thrashed at such a price. He would be delighted to take a second thrashing on such terms. There was little of the *Pun-d'Onor* about Trefusis, in spite of the stage-villain face.

* * * * *

Mr. Petre had grown more sealed up than ever. There were days when he never showed his face out of doors. He would spend whole weeks in the country, buried, lost, unattainable. Charlie Terrard began to wonder whether that stupendous brain were sound, and whether so large and such sudden

operations had not begun to undermine the Imperial Intelligence which had fascinated him during all those months.

He had looked up Mr. Petre once or twice as the summer dragged on, first before he had gone away to Switzerland—and then he had thought him somewhat changed; again on his return, when the change was notable, and for the worse. He had tried gently to suggest a little going out into the world, a little relief from such strange isolation; but he had met with so fierce and unaccustomed a refusal to discuss the thing at all, that he had shrunk back—and he let some weeks go by without troubling that inhuman loneliness.

For Mr. Petre was suffering after a fashion which Terrard could not understand. The original gnawing tooth of self-ignorance, the now maddening, now despairing and numbing presence of an impotent self that was not a self, had been reinforced as an agent of decay by a new and surely morbid mood; active, intense, destructive. Mr. Petre had grown frenzied against that base, bewildering world of money, His own comet-like path through it had no effect upon him as a good fortune, or even as a mere adventure, It had the effect of an increasing evil at the very core of his being.

Of old friends, of the ties which alone make human life endurable after forty—let alone at his age—he had none. He was wrecked and spiritually ruined; imprisoned, starved, exiled, damned. In the place of such good, human, necessary things as support a man with the savour of his youth and manhood—his old books and friends, and loves and worship, and air and powers of home—he was associating with what every nerve in him, every nerve inherited from the lost youth and middle-age of a better world, was exasperated against, and rejected as vile.

He called in a routine way at the office—as briefly as he could. He signed. He excused himself. The air of the place, the face of Trefusis, the talk of lesser men ruined and of the innocent caught unaware, of guttersnipes suddenly enriched, poisoned him out of all measure. It was perhaps the heat. We all remember that summer of '53.

The man fell ill. He had long ago cut off his telephone. His bouts of country air failed to cure him. He would return restlessly to town, and yet walked the few steps from the gate of the Temple to the Row (by night if he could) in terror of being accosted. The few notes sent to him remained unanswered. He refused to go near the office.

He saw Trefusis only twice. A third suggested meeting he escaped by a pretended absence. The new shares lay in the Bank. He tried to forget them. Later, the face of Trefusis began to haunt him unpleasantly, and a thirst which was becoming a wild longing for freedom and a clean riddance of all that abominable circumstance.

Then came dreams to torture him. Every night some new terror of sly inhuman creeping acquaintance poisoned his soul in dreadful sleep and the savour of it during the day, a savour of what was vampire-like and snake-like in the vices of the modern market fastened on him within. His soul was in hell.

He refused all service save that of a woman who came in late of a morning and left at night. What we have read of misers became true of this man, for whom the curse of gold was active in a very different way from what any miser has ever felt.

There came a point where the servant grew alarmed. She had heard Terrard's name and knew his direction. She told him, and he had written asking to call again, fearing to come without warning. He had received a shaky line in reply, saying that the millionaire would rather be alone.

The message troubled Charlie Terrard.

But it troubled him less than it might have done. The biggest and the best was over. The Master would hardly stay in Europe much longer. The climate of home would soon call him, as it called so many of his compatriots, back to the hale New England winter.

Doubtless he had reserved his berth already on a late October boat: his suite rather . . . No. . . . Seeing his queer ways, rather a berth. But a single cabin. Oh, yes. Charlie was sure of that!

Meanwhile he, Charlie, had done extremely well, and that was the main thing. So had the other half of Blake and Blake.

He did not disturb the great man. He thought it would be time to call on him later in the holidays: he looked forward to a long respite from these awkward puzzling interviews, each of which had opened a new mine of gold, but each of which had increasingly strained poor Charlie. He was well rid of that strain.

In such a mood he got a sudden summons. Not over the 'phone; it was a brief note brought by hand to his office just as he was going off for the day. It was headed from the rooms in the Temple, and it ran:

"DEAR MR. TERRARD,

"Will you not come round to me here *as soon as you can.* I am sorry to disturb you so late in office hours, but I shall think myself fortunate if this finds you. For your presence is, believe me, most urgent to my peace of mind.

"JOHN K. PETRE."

Terrard was on the point of telephoning to the Temple to assure Mr. Petre that he was hastening westward to such a summons, when he remembered that this miserable hermit had cut off his wire. He would not lose a moment, even to see his partner. He left a scrawl for Charlbury telling him to be in that evening *without fail:* that Petre had suddenly woken up and was moving. Then he went off eastward at a trot to the Mansion House, rotored to Blackfriars, crossed on foot, rotored again to the Temple. No man could have done it in less, since the new regulations. From the Temple Gate, off Carmelite Street, he ran across to the Row, ran up the stairs, and stood puffing in front of Mr. Petre's oak.

What was it? Heart? Rotor slump? Blackmail? He decided for blackmail, and was making a rapid calculation on the best business lines when the door

opened—its own master opened it—and there stood Mr. Petre before him, haggard, tired out, stooping.

"Come in," he said, in a voice so changed that Terrard was shocked. "Come in! It 's good of you to have come so quickly! I needed you! You 're a good friend," and he pressed the young man's hand. "Sit down . . . Terrard. . . . I—I 've been sleeping badly. I hardly slept all the night before last. Last night I couldn't sleep at all. I 'm done!" He looked it.

Terrard began to murmur something. Mr. Petre put up his hand. "No, Terrard. Hear me a little. It won't take long. But I can't wait. I couldn't trust anyone else, but you . . . I . . . I . . . didn't really know anyone else . . . and all this filthy chopping and watching and over-reaching . . . oh!"

Terrard, used as he was to marvels from that mouth, felt, even after all these months of incalculability an appreciable astonishment.

"Hear me!" Mr. Petre went on. "You can help me . . . No one else can." Then he halted.

"What is it, Mr. Petre?" said Terrard in his best bedside manner.

"It 's the shares!" said Mr. Petre hoarsely. "I can't bear them . . . and Trefusis . . . and all

that . . . It 's intolerable ! " and he sank back.

" You 're ill ! " said the other, still more sympathetically. " Give yourself time, Mr. Petre."

Mr. Petre shook his head with some remaining energy.

" No," he answered. " No ! I shall be right when I am rid of this burden. . . . You can do it. . . . But do it at once ! "

" Do what ? " said Terrard.

" Get rid of those shares," said Mr. Petre.

" What shares ? " came the startled answer.

" Those. I don't know what you call them. Those damned Amalgamated, I mean Rotor, no British—— Oh, curse it, Terrard," the voice sinking again, " it 's beyond me ! Get rid of them for me, I can't bear it ! "

Terrard could not believe his ears.

" I get rid of . . . Mr. Petre, what do you mean ? "

" What I say," with a burst of new energy. " Turn them into money. I must go free. . . . Ever since ——" He checked himself. " Well, no matter, but ever since a certain moment in a certain day it 's been cozening and evil beyond a harassed man's enduring ; and nightmares, Terrard. I 've come

to the end of my tether. . . . Terrard, what 's my holding worth? Now? To-night?"

Terrard had seen the last tape—luckily: 121. He remembered the original allotment—the balance after the frills (especially his own substantial frill), and he took for granted that none had been sold. He made a rapid calculation. Then—as though in a religious awe of such a sum—instead of speaking, he pulled out his pencil, and jotted figures down on a half sheet from the table and handed it to Mr. Petre . . . There was written, "roughly £2,634,300."

Mr. Petre looked at the row of digits with a dull, unhappy eye. "Turn 'em into money," he said, "clean money—and put it in the Bank for me —to-night: no . . . what am I saying . . . I 'm ill, as you say, Terrard; I haven't slept for three days hardly . . . I 'm in for another night of it," and he groaned.

"My dear sir," gasped Charlie, "you can't go into the market and sell a lump of that sort like . . . like eggs. It wants any amount of handling—and even then what a crash!"

"Oh?" said the suffering man sullenly. "I didn't know. I don't understand these things. What 's to be done? I can't wait. I won't."

Terrard grasped at the only way out.

"If you really mean it, Mr. Petre," he said, solemnly and slowly, separating every word, "there is one rapid way, and only one." Mr. Petre made no sign: he only waited. "Trefusis might take over —but at a sacrifice—Mr. Petre—a very heavy sacrifice, I 'm afraid."

"He would, would he?" caught up Mr. Petre, with a gleam of eagerness. "Would he pay over—now, any time, at once?"

"Well," said the other, "it 's not a matter of moment, a great operation like that . . . it would want financing, he 'd have to work it delicately."

It was odd to find himself telling such a man such things—as though to a child. But he dared not question. He humoured and followed the lead given him.

Mr. Petre menaced disaster, and Terrard rapidly added, "But *if* he 'll meet you—and at a price, Mr. Petre, he would, I suppose—you could have a line that would bind him: and you could have it soon; *if* he 'll meet you," and he looked at the strange Thing before him, wondering.

"Any price," said Mr. Petre, groaning, "any price. *That* doesn't touch me."

"He 'd try to get all the difference of the rise, I 'm afraid," said Charlie.

"What 's the difference of the rise?"

"Why the rise since . . . since the deal. He 'd want the twenty per cent. premium back, Mr. Petre."

"It 's all Greek to me," said Mr. Petre, with a wearied bow of the head. "As he likes, what he likes. . . . Look here—give me the paper again. No—what 's the twenty per cent. premium, what 's it all about? Let him have it! What does it bring this down to?" and he tapped the paper with its pencilled millions.

Terrard jotted, amazed. "It doesn't leave more than two and a quarter," he answered.

"Two and a quarter what?"

"Millions," said Terrard in an awed voice.

"Tell him I 'll take two."

"Mr. Petre, Mr. Petre!" Terrard cried aloud in genuine concern. "Oh, Mr. Petre! it 's impossible . . . Do for heaven's sake . . ."

"Do as I tell you," said the elderly marvel in sudden and astonishing rage. "If he 'll do it now, to-night—he can have it. . . . If he won't, I 'm done with him."

"Mr. Petre," began the now terror-stricken Terrard—but Mr. Petre was silent. His effort had exhausted him.

Terrard cursed the absence of a telephone. He

must see Charlbury. He didn't trust himself. He looked at his watch. It wasn't yet six.

"If you 'll give me an hour," he said, "I 'll come back."

"If it must be, it must," said Mr. Petre, in the low tense tone of a man who bears the pangs of his tumour until the morphia comes. "But—as quick as you can . . . as quick as you can," and he closed his eyes.

Terrard was watching him. Was it madness or acting? And if it was affected (a miracle!), what object in it all?

But he could not delay. He left the eccentric —or genius—with his eyes still closed and dashed out. He ran to the nearest telephone, in a pub, and caught Charlbury, who was fuming at the other end of the wire: "No, don't argue. Meet me half-way—at the New Tavern; that 's half-way; it 's urgent." And at the New Tavern, to the sound of an intolerable band, and steadying his nerves with old brandy, Terrard told his quite incredible tale.

"Does he mean it?" said Charlbury when he had done.

Terrard arched his eyebrows. "Looks like it!" he said. "Anyhow, it 's orders. And you know what he is. It 's mortal to cross him."

Charlbury nodded. "What 's his game?" he half mused, screwing his little eyes together in a downward investigation of the floor.

"Beyond me!"

"There must be something," said Charlbury. Then a light broke on him, he slapped his thigh. "By God! The old weasel! He 's going to freeze Trefusis out!"

Terrard shook his head. "It can't be that. He 's offering them to Trefusis," he said.

Mr. Charlbury smiled pitifully. "That 's the bait," he remarked. "He 'll buy in later, after the slump."

Terrard respected his partner's judgment in High Finance now, as he had for so long in lesser things of the sort. But he had seen Petre's face with his own eyes that evening; Petre's bewildering appeal was still in his ears. He was confident there was something much deeper than so obvious a manœuvre. Perhaps a man like Petre, one of the masters of the world, had heard of coming war; of plague. After all, it wasn't the motive that counted, it was the incredible proposal itself. Mr. Petre was certainly determined to get rid of those shares.

His thoughts were interrupted by Charlbury's strong, short phrase: "What 's the Commission?"

"He had decided."

"There isn't any," answered Charlie as shortly.

Charlbury watched him narrowly. Then he spoke.

"Go to Trefusis," he said. "Get him as soon as ever he can be got. Tell him it goes through now or never. Get his name to it to-night—and make him understand it 'll cost him £40,000 to Blake and Blake—eight per cent. is moderate, damn it, for throwing half a million at a man's head without his having to move a finger for it. He 'll be 400,000 up . . . till it leaks out," and at that thought he grinned. "He knows you 've got John K. in your pocket" (Charlie had his doubts of that now). "If you tell him it 's now or never he 'll believe you —but by God, he 's a fool if he bites!"

"And what about our shares?" said the other half of Blake and Blake. "As you say—when it leaks out—when anyone . . . knows that John K. 's crawled out, the mercury 'll go down. It 'll be a cold day for B. A. R.—Bars."

"If the fool bites, we sell to-morrow morning. He 'll have his men out to buy. You may go to sleep on that. Ring me up at Walton Heath the moment you know."

And the New Tavern Conference broke up.

* * * * *

Charlie Terrard had the Daemon's luck that evening. By half-past seven he had got Trefusis, just back in his flat to dress. He had managed by something in his tone over the instrument to arrest him, and to make him put off the people he was going to. Before eight the two men were together, both standing ; Charlie dreadfully moved and hoping that his face quite covered the throbbing of his blood ; Trefusis looking him full and rather hardly in the face, with his brilliant dark eyes and raven beak, in the half light of the falling summer evening.

Charlie Terrard approached the enormous obstacle with a fevered determination ; it rendered him quite unnaturally abrupt.

" As I told you, I 've come from John K. It 's a big thing. Too big. No matter. It 's simple, anyhow. You heard me say that ; too simple. But you know what he is ? "

" Yes." Nor did Trefusis move a finger as he said it.

" He wants writing, to-night, now. I 'm dead sure of it, Trefusis. Don't disbelieve me. You 'll see what hangs on it. It he doesn't get your name to it to-night—there 's nothing doing in the morning."

" What is it ? " said the other in tones as fixed as his face.

Then Terrard delivered the mighty thing.

"Sit down," said Trefusis immovably, in a tone and with a gesture which were an invitation, but with an indefinable air of command which sat him ill. Terrard pulled a chair to the table and sat there with his head in his hands. The Dark Spirit of B.A.R.'s sank into his arm-chair, sitting in profile to Terrard, his arms slightly moving, gazing through the wall before him as he had gazed when first he awaited Petre weeks before.

A twenty minutes passed. There was no sound except the tiny ticking of a travelling clock upon the bracket below the Degas. The light failed. It was almost dusk.

At last Trefusis rose. Terrard rose with him and Trefusis spoke, in the gloaming. "Very well," he said.

His voice sounded a little weary. It was from the effort of such a survey of every peril, every trap, every consequence as not many men could have flashed through in such a space without a breakdown of attention. He had decided. Let 'em slump. He 'd buy himself—and hold. Let 'em attack. He had it all now—his own thing—and no one could undo it.

He, Henry Trefusis, would take on that offer,

trap or no trap, and become sole Master again of the thing he had made.

He did not turn to switch on the light. He wrote rapidly in the half darkness ten lines on a sheet of his paper, signed it, and held it out to Terrard. Something which corresponds to honour in that world forbade Terrard even to glance at it. He folded it rapidly and thrust it into his wallet.

"And what's *your* price?" the deep voice sneered in the dark. Terrard gave him Charlbury's figures.

"I suppose you want that in writing too?" said the voice again.

"No," said Charlie, "I trust you." With better light he would have seen the very slight mounting smile upon the other's face.

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

* * * * *

It was nine by the time Terrard was in the Temple doorway again and ringing at Mr. Petre's door. Quiet outside, and only a little radiance shining up from a bulb in the well of the stone staircase below. There was no reply. He rang again, and still no reply. He began to be afraid. He knew Mr. Petre's mania for isolation. He would be alone. Terrard had been

away three hours—more. He had said one hour. He rang again; still no reply. He knocked loudly and repeatedly, in dread; then came a step, slow but not uncertain, and Mr. Petre, refreshed, himself stood in the doorway.

"I was asleep," he said. "Lord, what a blessing! I thought I 'd never sleep again. . . . I 'm . . ." Then he remembered the cause of the young man's visit. "Come in," he said. "Have you done it? Have you seen them?"

"I 've got it here," said Terrard, and he handed it over. Mr. Petre read the brief document and breathed a deep breath of content. He heard Terrard repeat the original, the obvious words, that it would take a few days.

"That 's all right," said Mr. Petre, in a new, sane voice. "I shall sleep now—only, as soon as it can be done, get it done."

Then Terrard for the first time found that he was ravenous. He hastened to be gone; but before he tasted a crumb he had rung up "Marengo." "It 's through," he said, and all the answer he got was, "Ah! See you to-morrow morning."

* * * * *

At the opening of the morrow's market Blake and Blake began their careful selling; it had to be

delicately handled; and the next day, either someone knew or guessed things about B. A. R. S. and 119 was marked down, 118, 117, 118 again—116 at the close. But the operation was piloted through, and what was skimmed off was nothing to that lump coming in from Trefusis. They thought themselves well out of it. Before a week was out Bars were steady at 112. Then a very slow rise began—and it hasn't stopped to this day.*

* * * * *

The instruments had been delivered in due form. Mr. Petre didn't understand instruments—he said. He had signed, as he always did, where he was told to sign. He did not regard himself as well into port till he had verified the figures in the book at his own bank—cash—only cash, clean cash, and the shares forgotten and done for.

And there it lay piled on its original foundation—the most original Current Account that ever stood in any man's name since the first Banker, before the beginning of years, had it revealed to him by an angel that you can always borrow from a thrifty fool at 4 per cent. to lend to a wise one at 6.

* * * * *

*Nominally 135—but you 're lucky to get them.

Mr. Petre—well over three million in cash—went down to Hampshire already half restored. He took a long and complete repose. He returned to London reluctantly, lest there should be some message waiting for him there, found none, and determined once and for all that he must get loose and free.

The one good thing about his amazing adventure was that he could go whither he willed and had full command of his own life.

But before he would get him away—somewhere far away—to end his life in his own peace—he would make one last effort to recover what he had lost, and to raise again within himself a living soul.

He knew not whom to trust. It quaintly occurred to him (and quite rightly) that he would trust the good and humble woman who served him, and who cooked for over three million pounds after the most atrocious fashion known to man.

"Mrs. Malton," he said, "I want you to do something for me." He eccentrically pulled out a five-pound note, and Mrs. Malton grew faint at the sight thereof. It gave her a turn.

"Mrs. Malton, I trust you."

"I 'm sure," said Mrs. Malton, with an old-fashioned bob.

"I do," said Mr. Petre, interrupting her. "But

remember that I do. Mrs. Malton, what is my name?"

"Mr. Patten, sir," said Mrs. Malton.

"Well," said Mr. Petre, "I've got a secret to confide to you. My name's not Patten. It's Jasper."

"Indeed, sir," said Mrs. Malton dutifully. She had no doubt at all what was the matter with her employer, but her loyalty stood firm.

"Now, Mrs. Malton, I depend upon you not to tell a soul of what I am going to ask you to do."

"Oh, you may depend and depend, sir," said Mrs. Malton, "always allowing that it's right and proper."

"Mrs. Malton, I want you to go to the Public Library, and ask them for a book, any book, on Loss of Memory." Mrs. Malton bobbed again. She thought it was an extraordinary fuss to make about nothing, and five pounds left her under some strain of conscience. The good gentleman would never mean it if he were in his right mind. "Now, Mrs. Malton, go out and ask for the latest, and bring it back to me. I mean, find out where it's sold, and buy a copy, and bring it back to me. Take a cab, be quick, and keep the change."

Mrs. Malton was disappointed. She was looking

forward to taking home that piece of paper unbroken; but her virtue was proof, and her loyalty. She brought back Wittrington—a book not twelve months old, and apparently, to judge by the Publishers' Press Notices at the end, the last edition of the final authority upon such things. Mr. Petre turned to a telephone book remaining from the old days when he had possessed that instrument. He looked up Wittrington, and found an untitled person of that name with the right initials.

"Mrs. Malton, can you use the telephone?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Malton with another bob, "in my last place I did it frequent."

"Mrs. Malton, I want you to go to the nearest telephone, and say that you are speaking for a man who will give any fee that may be asked to visit the greatest specialist upon this," and he wrote down upon a piece of paper—'severe nervous trouble involving confusion and loss of continuity of thought.' "Say that the conditions are," here he wrote down again—"'The name will not be given. Any appointment will be kept.' Use those very words, Mrs. Malton, and use no other. And as you value your salvation, breathe not a word of this to anyone."

Mrs. Malton was away longer than he liked; but when she got back she was clear enough, and very sensible.

"Dr. Wittrington was dead. A name had been given her. It was the name of Sir Henry Brail, with an address in Harley Street. She had written it down in her large, irregular, childish letters, and off she was sent again to give that exact message to Sir Henry Brail. She came back more quickly this time, and with a very business-like message to convey. Four o'clock the next day. A hundred guineas. And of course complete privacy. No question of asking a name.

So far so good. Mr. Petre had what he wanted, and he would try it as a last poor chance before cutting himself off and getting clean away. What he had learned of the name he bore—if it were his name—was no more than the bare facts which recalled in him nothing. Maybe his soul would be healed. He might return (would it be to the States? more than one had seemed to recognise him, and John K. Petre he certainly was for all the world) to a home that knew him and that he knew; but if the worst came to the worst, and that brazen wall proved impassable, why, then there was nothing for it but to get him clean away.

CHAPTER IX

MR. PETRE approached the door in Harley Street with some little fear in his heart.

It was the first time he had broken the wall of his isolation with any human being. It had been a human being, humble, poor and loyal; to be trusted, if anyone could be. But the doctor was another matter. Mr. Petre—he knew not why, some impression perhaps received in the old days of which he knew nothing and which yet remained with him—Mr. Petre distrusted all professions, all corporations; for he feared that their members would always be more loyal to their Guild than to the private citizen with whom they dealt. He stopped in the street a moment to count the twenty-one fivers in their envelope (a risk, but he had not learnt the precautions of the rich), and found them accurate. He went up to the door, rang, and was admitted by an impressive mute.

He was shown into a room where he had to wait for some time, after the ritual of medicine, and in which his spirits sank lower and lower as he turned

over the pages of a dead weekly. When he was at last admitted into the Presence what he saw did nothing to raise his spirits.

Not that there were any instruments of torture furnishing the Great Specialist's inner room, not even one of those chairs with strange joints which threaten abominable things; no, it was the spirit of the room, consonant to the figure which inhabited it and had made it. For the walls were covered with a dark brown composition embossed to imitate leather, and too thickly covered with some varnish. In the fire-place was an imitation fire of imitation logs, through which no gas flames murmured now. On the walls were four large steel engravings, all after Landseer; upon the mantelpiece one large clock, of stone, funereal black and with the ghastly-white face of operated men.

At the table, whereon were ranged four or five books of reference and, exactly ordered, blank paper, a pen, ink and a blotter, sat the Great Specialist himself. He did not rise at Mr. Petre's entrance, but very courteously motioned him to a chair, on which that financier sat down uncertainly, awaiting inquisition. The Great Specialist looked at him for a moment, and he at the Great Specialist. He felt sure that the Great Specialist was searching

the very inwards of his soul, while as for himself, he could not even search, but only very generally receive the most external, the most superficial impression of that eminent man before him. Yet of the two names — had the Scientist but known it — that of John K. Petre was more renowned than that of Henry Brail; for it meant more money.

It was a very long face, which would have been weak about the mouth had not many years of posing to many clients, most of them wealthy, given it a sort of lugubrious restraint. The eyes were fatigued, the scanty hair was grey, and when the voice spoke it was sepulchral.

"Mr. . . . ?" began the voice, and then checked itself, remembering the special conditions of that consultation. The face smiled inwardly and strangely at the recollection thereof. The hand attached to its owner's arm scratched down headings on the corner of the foolscap with a rasping pen.

"I must ask you," continued the Master of Hidden Things, "a few questions, if you please." Mr. Petre bowed his head. "In the first place . . ."

"The reason I have come," interrupted the Unknown nervously . . .

The Great Specialist put up a dried open hand,

like a policeman stopping traffic, and said, rather more loudly than before:

"I must beg you, my dear sir! I must beg you! Pray, leave yourself in my hands. I must ask you these preliminary questions before we go any further." The hand dropped, and the voice continued: "Your father's age, or age at death?" The pen was prepared to scratch, and the tired eyes looked inquisitively upwards into Mr. Petre's face.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Mr. Petre, with more boldness than he thought himself possessed of.

"Did you—do you—not know your father?" asked the more startled voice.

"Not from Adam," said Mr. Petre composedly.

So nearly as such beings can express surprise the Great Specialist expressed surprise in a sudden movement of the brows. His pen was scratching. It scratched "Special circumstances affecting case. Bastardy." Its driver then superfluously inquired:

"May I take down that, that particular aspect of the case?"

"Yes, certainly," said the patient, almost cheerfully.

"Then I take it," continued the scientist slowly, "if you do not even know your father's name,

it is no good my asking the date of his death, nor the cause of it? Nor, I suppose, whether he had any nervous trouble, to your knowledge?"

"Not the least use," said Mr. Petre with increasing firmness.

"In fact, you have no idea of your ancestry—your hereditary history—upon that side?"

"None," said Mr. Petre.

The Great Specialist coughed gently but firmly to himself, sighed, took up the pen again, and began again with the same upward inquisitive look.

"Mother's name?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Petre.

This time the Great Specialist betrayed real emotion. He was not quite sure that he was being respectfully treated; besides which, his Method was drifting into danger. He put down the pen, leaned back in his chair, joined his finger tips, and gazed at Mr. Petre for a minute or two in the fashion of a schoolmaster who has sympathy with an erring boy, but fears he may be too young to understand the full gravity of his fault.

"Am I to understand," said the Inquisitor, still keeping his hands together and not yet reaching out for his pen, "that you know *nothing* of *either* of your parents?"

"Nothing whatsoever," said Mr. Petre, looking up at the ceiling. He was a little piqued at the first interruption he had suffered, and he was determined to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth—and even the whole truth when he should be allowed to volunteer it.

The Inquisitor leant forward.

"Now, my dear sir, be good enough to fix your attention upon me."

Mr. Petre looked at his enemy in mild, benevolent fashion.

"You know nothing whatever of your ancestry upon either side?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Petre.

"Were you a foundling, sir?" said the Specialist sharply.

"Not that I know of," replied his guest. "The fact is that I have come to see you because . . ."

The large dried hand went up again.

"One moment. We must get things clear to begin with. In these cases of nervous trouble—I am speaking frankly—it is essential to put things in the right order to the patient, or the whole consultation fails of its purpose."

Mr. Petre nodded, and accepted. He saw that he was not believed.

"Now, sir," continued the Specialist, "since I must accept what you say" (it was pretty clear that he did not), "I can only ask you questions which are within your own knowledge. Have you (you will excuse my direct question?) have you, to your knowledge, any taint?"

"Any what?" said Mr. Petre anxiously.

"Taint—alcoholic, for instance?"

Mr. Petre thought for a moment, and answered, "No. At any rate, I should doubt it."

"What are your habits in the matter of—ah!—wine?"

"Claret for lunch, usually, or beer. Beer or claret at my dinner. Liqueur with my coffee . . ."

"Not so fast, please, not so fast! Yes, coffee . . . How much?"

"Oh! A cup."

"I mean" (more severely), "how much claret, how much liqueur?"

Mr. Petre considered.

"Say a bottle. Liqueur, oh, well a glass."

The pen scribbled away furiously.

"For how long?" asked the writer.

"Since April 3rd, just after noon."

"And before that . . .?"

"The reason I can't tell you," began the victim, "is . . ."

"I *must* beg you to let me act in my own way, sir," broke in Sir Henry almost angrily. "If you refuse me essential information, the consequences will not be on my head. . . ." He paused. "Since you refuse to inform me on this point—and I must tell you I am used to such difficulties—I will leave it," and he wrote down, "Probable case of chronic alcoholism. Consumption daily in last five months at least one litre at 12%, one decilitre at 35%; probably more."

"Can you tell me," said the Specialist, breaking new ground and preparing again to write, "whether at any stage you have used drugs—even as long ago as five or ten years?"

"I am afraid I can't," said Mr. Petre.

The Medical Genius restrained his temper, determined—he was a conscientious man—to do his best by the impossible fellow, and started anew.

"I must now," he continued, putting on a look of much greater importance than he had yet assumed, and settling himself up in his chair, "I must now, my dear sir, put to you a very intimate question indeed; it is one which we always have to ask at this stage of our inquiries." (Mr. Petre

marvelled what that stage exactly was. But he was wise enough to remain silent). "*Do you dream?*"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Petre cheerfully. He was all right now; this was plain sailing. The pen began writing busily.

"For instance," murmured the Sepulchral voice, the face still bent over the paper, "last night?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Petre. "Most nights. Last night certainly. Yes, most nights."

The pen was now working furiously.

"Now, if you please," said the Specialist, his mind working with such energy that his face looked almost bright for a moment, "now, if you please, the details, if you remember them."

"Certainly," said Mr. Petre. "I dreamed I went to Liverpool Street and took a ticket for New York; the man who gave me the ticket through the little hole turned out to be a peacock, but I didn't think it at all odd. After that I found myself trying to read a book, but I didn't understand the letters, so I put it down and found myself dropping into a sort of confusion. That was my dream, as far as I can remember it."

The pace at which Sir Henry's pen had raced was worthy of an expert in shorthand. He had the

whole thing down, and was aglow with excitement and interest.

"Ah!—Now—" he said, "this is really important! Here we have a clue. Such illusions as you may be suffering from . . ."

"But," interrupted Mr. Petre, "I am not . . ."

Up went the hand again. "I say, as you may be suffering from," went on Sir Henry, "we shall, I think, be able to explain. But we cannot resolve the complex until you shall tell me quite frankly to what vivid experience of childhood—no doubt of a *very* private nature; but you must tell me all—you most naturally return in your innermost thoughts."

"To none," said Mr. Petre, in a voice that was almost a shout, for the delay was exasperating him, and he refused to be put off any further though the hand was up again at "Line blocked." "I remember *nothing* of my childhood. I remember *nothing* of my manhood. I remember *nothing* before last Easter—to be accurate, last Easter Monday. That 's why I came to see you!"

The Great Specialist turned upon him a face of stone.

"Why did you not say that before, sir. It would have saved us both a great deal of trouble."

"Because you wouldn't let me."

"Come, come," said the doctor, "we must have no discussion." The pen came down upon the paper again and wrote a line. "I take it, then, that you require my aid in a case of Amnemonesis."

"No doubt," said Mr. Petre. "No doubt. Well, yes, if that 's the name. My memory failed completely and suddenly about noon on April 3rd, 1953—this year. I remember nothing of myself before that moment." He had got it all in by rapid speaking.

"Pray don't interrupt me," said the Great Specialist, in the tone of a governess, only a little more pettishly. "It is a case of loss of memory, or rather, let us call it loss of identity." He twisted his head sideways and murmured to himself: "What Pfungst has named 'loss of the time-space continuum in its subjective aspect." Then he got his head into the normal position again and murmured in a still lower tone, which Mr. Petre could only just catch: "*Paranoia penipsissimisma*, some people call it." He added a little louder, looking up at Mr. Petre and presenting the title with a touch of affection, "Also called Bantam's Complex, from Bantam, Sir George Bantam."

"Indeed," said Mr. Petre, slightly interested, but

with too much gnawing at his heart to be really gripped by the thing.

"It is more generally known as the Seventh Sub-Complex, after Boileau's category. It is universally so known upon the Continent—ah, yes," then he began scribbling again. "This is the address you want," said the Master of Modern Science, jumping up suddenly from his chair. He handed it as a superior officer might hand an order to a subordinate.

"Could I. . . . Can I see him now?"

"Now? At once?" answered the Specialist, frowning.

"Well," said Mr. Petre, "I have reasons."

"Yes, I know," replied the other courteously. "You are all like that. I will see." He pressed a buzzer with his foot, and told the man who came in to ring up Sir William Bland, and ask him whether he could see an urgent case on the part of Sir Henry Brail, a case of M.3. The man bowed as to Royalty, and reappeared saying that Sir William Bland happened to have just one half hour free, at that moment, from four-forty-five to five-fifteen. Mr. Petre looked at his watch. He had five minutes. He asked where it was. Strangely enough, this new address was also in Harley Street, and some odd

The second and more jovial Great Specialist,
Sir William Bland.

connection beneath the level of the waking mind gave the new millionaire a mood of happiness at the thought that he had time to walk and save a taxi fare.

Then followed an awkward moment. Mr. Petre shyly pulled out the envelope. Sir Henry was far too precise and honourable for that.

"No! No! My dear sir," he said. "I won't dream of it. A misapprehension. My own fault indeed, but still, a misapprehension. I had the idea that you suffered from, I mean that we were to deal with—ah!—*Illusions*. Yes, Illusions. I don't pretend to go out of my province. Indeed, I prefer not to deal with any cases not covered by Purall's formula. . . . One moment." He came rapidly up to his visitor and pushed back the lid of the right eye. "No," he said, "not a case for me in any way."

"No illusions!" he muttered to himself as he turned back. "No illusions under the Bergheim test."

Mr. Petre rubbed the replaced eyelid and made one more protest in favour of due payment; but his advisor was determined. Mr. Petre thanked him warmly though confused, and was off. The impressive mute showed him out, and in a couple of minutes

he was ringing at another door half a dozen houses down the street.

Sir William Bland received him in a room extremely different from that in which he had just suffered. It was the room in which a man might live rather than work. There was a very large photograph of a Royalty in a sloping silver frame upon the table, autographed. There was a novel lying half-open. There was a bad portrait upon one wall, and a good, very small, Corot on the wall opposite; no other pictures at all. A small room, cosy, domestic; just the thing for the nerves.

Sir William Bland greeted Mr. Petre as a life-long friend, and this the reader will find the more remarkable if he remembers that nothing had been said of who Mr. Petre was or what Mr. Petre was worth. Sir William Bland was well suited to such a rôle. He had a round, kind face, in which only the eyes were insincere; hardly any eyebrows; simple steel spectacles, and a fine bald dome, with a fringe of hair.

He took his colleague's note and read it, smiling as cheerfully over it as though it were a packet of mild fun. Then he gave tongue, surveying the new-comer with ease and happiness.

"Loss of memory? My dear sir? Loss of memory?

That is what you say it is. Eh? Ah, yes; loss of memory. I have" (he glanced at the note), "I have the date here. Oh! Yes! April 3rd. . . . H'm. . . . Yes. *Easier*, my dear sir, *easier* if I could know something of—well" (resignedly), "I understand that the conditions are absolute."

"Yes," said Mr. Petre.

"I would respect any confidence religiously—you know that?"

"Indeed, yes," said Mr. Petre, touched, "but . . . sincerely . . . I must keep my rule. It was not lightly made."

"Very well, sir, very well!" sighed Sir William Bland.

He asked a few common questions on diet and habit, all easily answered and all normally.

Then the great business was seriously approached.

"I must ask you," said the Magician, "to do one or two things if you please. In the first place" (he opened a drawer in a little table and pulled out a little book), "would you mind looking through this, page by page, and telling me if anything in it strikes even the slightest echo within you?"

Mr. Petre took the book. It was a polyglot New Testament. There was the French, which seemed to him pretty dull. He glanced at a few words in

Italian which he recognised, and one or two German words with which he was familiar. The rest meant nothing to him, except that he could distinguish the Spanish as Spanish and no more, and he noted the odd script of the eastern versions. He laid it down again.

"No, Sir William, it recalls nothing," he said.

"The sacred words," said Sir William Bland earnestly (Mr. Petre had been dealing with the Genealogy in St. Matthew), "recall nothing of childhood? No tender associations?" There was infinite pathos in his voice, and he went so far as to lay a sympathetic hand upon his patient's arm.

"No, sir, no," said Mr. Petre, a little abruptly for him. "The fact is, I must tell you plainly. Loss of Memory is a weak term. At a certain recent date" (here he remembered that he had divulged it, and his terror returned), "I lost all sense of what I had been, where I had been, who I was. I retained my habit of mind, and all my knowledge of general things in life, but not one personal association. . . . It is very distressing," he added.

"Yes, indeed, my dear sir," said Sir William, drawing the nose-end of his eyebrows up in an agony of kindness. "But it will comfort you to hear that nowadays we nearly *always*—I may say *always*

—manage, sooner or later"—he was spinning out his words as he fumbled again in the drawer of the little table, and brought out yet another book —it was in German, of course, but its peculiarity was an appendix in which were brightly-coloured pictures after the German fashion, all of them attaching to childish tales ; and the colours especially were German.

"No, my dear sir," said Sir William, pulling his chair a little nearer to his victim, "pray glance at this—the more casually the better—and see whether a stab of memory . . ."

Mr. Petre saw on the front page some words in German script and then, in our type, the word "Perrault." He made nothing of that. He opened the book.

Mr. Petre rapidly turned over the score of pages. There was a huntsman in a red hat with a feather in it, a very large muzzle-loading gun under his arm, holding a dead fox up by the tail, while his companion blew a horn ; there was a lion with a human-looking face holding up his paw to a young man with gooseberry eyes who was pulling a thorn out ; there was an old gentleman in a grey tunic pointing towards a star, his gaze followed by a young gentleman in a blue tunic whose face was

fatuous beyond the dreams of avarice; there was a fairy with a star-tipped wand touching a grand coach and six for the benefit of a pasty-faced wench, over-dressed and with flaxen, plaited hair; there was another Gretchen asleep on a bed, cobwebbed, and with sleeping guards around her, and a Junker not much her senior, prepared to press a Junker's salute upon her lips, and so on. It meant nothing to Mr. Petre—nothing at all.

"None of these simple nursery tales," said the Specialist, wagging his head slightly from side to side with an infinite compassion, and gazing steadily upon the sufferer. Mr. Petre shut the ridiculous book smartly.

"It 's no good answering questions. What am I to do?"

To his surprise, he was begged very courteously to take off his coat and waistcoat, tie, shirt and vest; which done, instruments were used upon him, of measurements and of percussion, and he was touched by wires, which his host had drawn like thin serpents from a corner, and which oddly registered mysteries upon dials. He was struck four or five times: harder than he liked. An ugly piece of machinery was clamped upon his arm below the elbow; he was made to sit down and cross

his legs, and he was unpleasantly cut with the edge of the hand below the knee, with the result that his foot kicked upwards. In fact, all manner of things were done to him, which, in an ignorant age, would have made him suspect a charlatan. But we live in better times.

When he was allowed to dress himself and become human again (for it is human to be clothed) he was aware that the Master was pacing his little round body up and down the room, with his hands crossed behind his back, and was reciting to himself cabalistic sounds; words of no meaning to the profane. Then he stopped suddenly, looked Mr. Petre in the face, and said:

"My dear sir, yours is a very curious case. A very strange case! You have told me nothing of yourself —because as my colleague has warned me, you will not give any details of yourself since . . . since . . . since the sad . . ."

"No," interrupted Mr. Petre doggedly, "that is the strict condition of my presence here to-day. Upon terms," he added, though it hurt him to allude so coarsely to the fee, "which I think you know."

"Precisely," answered Sir William, "precisely . . . yes . . . quite. Ah. . . . You remember

everything, well, since that unfortunate . . . since the date on which. . .

"Yes," said Mr. Petre shortly.

"*Quite* normally, my dear sir? *Quite* normally?"

"I suppose normally," said Mr. Petre. "I seem to remember as well as anybody else."

The Specialist looked at his watch; a sudden light broke over that face which masked so well the profound intelligence within. "It is clearly a case," he chirruped, "for Sir Christopher Cayley."

But Mr. Petre had had enough. Whether his new-found wealth had bred in him a new-found assurance, or whether he had reached the limit of what humanity can bear, he kept his own counsel and said: "Well, Sir William, I am sorry you can do nothing for me."

"It is not that; it is not that," said the little man eagerly. "It is that really, my dear sir, Sir Christopher is the *one* man in all England—I think I may say in all *Europe* . . ."

"Yes," said Mr. Petre, "yes." He had already taken up his hat and his stick.

"Now shall I advise Sir Christopher? Shall I advise him now? Shall I write a note?"

"Thank you," said Mr. Petre. "I will consider it. If you will allow me, I will communicate with

you again." But alas! for the integrity of a good man; he had firmly determined never to touch the Faculty again till agony should drive him. He was fed up—to the back teeth.

Slowly he produced the envelope with his eyes nervously diverted from the round face before him. There was no awkwardness. But there was on Mr. Petre's side a pleased surprise at the simplicity of the passage. "Thank you a thousand times," he said. . . . "You have already done me a world of good, believe me . . . but the truth is, if I were to give you my name . . ."

A suppressed smile upon the lips of the expert barely betrayed his emotions. He had known that kind of thing before, and he never irritated that mood. He would have lost money by irritating that mood. But in the other cases he had always known in time, and before the event, who the Mysterious Stranger (though he might call himself the Grand Mogul) really was. In the other cases an agonised relative had informed him before the visit, had poured the true tale into his ear, warning him of a brother or a father's sensitiveness and shame. To-day he was nonplussed.

Everything about this last patient betrayed precision; but who he was he could not for the life

of him have told you. Even the very slight American accent had worn away. . . . Sir William did regret one thing. He *would* have asked to know who the funny fellow thought he was. He kept a book with screaming things of the sort. But it couldn't be helped. Perhaps he 'd find out later.

As Mr. Petre walked off, filled with despair, down the street towards Oxford Street, Sir William at a little discreet distance from the light watched him from the bow-window ; then he shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, rang the bell, and sent for the next case: the Dowager who was the head of the list in that great room without, where already two or three were attempting to beguile the time with *Life* and even *Punch*. She had come with her keeper, but he saw her alone. She was quite harmless.

Mr. Petre, bearing that inward burden of his, despairing, hopeless of rediscovering a knowledge without which life was not life, still paced southward, choosing the squares and the less occupied streets, until he found himself upon the top of St. James's Hill. There he halted a moment at the corner of Piccadilly gazing down towards the Palace ; the Clubs, the old brick towers, the Guardsmen on sentry-go at the door, the crowd of cars, even the

Joyous recognition of Buffy Thomas.

London sky under a fresh autumnal breeze—all was as familiar to him as familiar could be. All was part of some home furniture in his mind; but of the home itself, nothing. A complete blank. The soul had lost its habitation.

* * * * *

Mr. Petre went out from this last of his ordeals profoundly depressed. By all our standards he was greatly to be envied. He was untroubled by any great responsibility. He had drunk the water of Lethe; he was in health, he was rich.

Yet that intimate thing within us which demands immortality, and which we call Ourselves, was incomplete, and he was a maimed man.

Not all the high respect with which he could now be surrounded at will was other than a nightmare to him. He was gnawed by the loss of that mysterious past; by the lack in him of that momentum of things lived under one mind, co-ordinating all that human, continuous, soul whereby indeed we suffer, but also are. He passionately desired—more than ever he now desired—now that he must face exile—to know himself.

His hands were clasped behind his back, his gold-headed cane within them; his eyes were bent

upon the pavement in a reverie; he wondered and wondered, and he was tragically ill at ease. He had lost his bearings. He was more wretched in his loneliness than the poorest of the millions in the vast surge of life about him.

As he thus slowly paced St. James's Street, down towards the Palace, under the long evening light, half forgetting the roar of the traffic around him, he suddenly heard, just as he passed White's Club, a voice very familiar; and looking up with a start, he saw a face more familiar still. It was a hearty face, the face of a man of his own age, but bronzed and gay, the face of a man who had advanced up the hill at a vigorous stride, and had now suddenly halted with his arms extended and had cried:

"Peter Blagden!"

"That 's my name!" said Mr. Petre, as suddenly. To which he added, "Buffy Thompson!" Within his mind what had been a dead wall of mist began to roll and form into clouds; and now dim shapes appeared, which were already almost memories.

"Peter Blagden!" shouted the new-comer; and slapped him on the shoulder and put an arm in his and led him sharply round the corner into St. James's Place.

"When did you get back?"

As naturally as if his misfortune had never happened, Mr. Petre said:

"She was due at Portsmouth on April the 3rd, I think. My memory is not very good, Buffy. But I 'm pretty sure she made good time. I am pretty sure it was the 3rd that I landed."

"April the *third!* Good Lord, man! That 's half a year ago. Why didn't you let me know?" said Buffy.

They crossed St. James's Street together.

"I was ill," said Mr. Petre, looking oddly askance and a little ashamed.

"Well," said the honest friend, "that 's all over, anyhow. Come along in with me. You 'll want your rooms again."

He stopped in front of a door in the little side street and put in the key.

"Yes," said Mr. Petre, hesitating more oddly still, "these are my rooms all right."

The rolling mists in his mind had formed now definitely into clouds with shapes to them, and gaps in between through which appeared things more and more definite. He had a sudden sharp vision of a red-brick cloister and of the same voice shouting to him from a window, and it was mixed up in his mind with the name of a place, but he could not

catch that name. Cayridge? Clayridge? He had simultaneously a little picture presented to his mind of green Downs beyond a valley, and he was thinking of horses; and again the wreaths of the mist blotted all that out, and he was side by side with this same man on a public platform listening to his friend orating badly. He mechanically pulled out his watch as he had done on that distant day on that platform. Political speeches bored him.

Mr. Petre put his watch back and looked pathetically into Buffy's face.

"Thompson," he said slowly, "Thompson, you 're a good fellow."

"Are you ill?" said Thompson, holding him as if he were afraid he would fall.

"No, not exactly," said Mr. Petre. "I *have* been ill. Take me in."

Mr. Petre had forgotten all about the Temple, all about Trefusis, all about Charlie Terrard.

South England came flooding into his mind, and an irresistible desire for sleep.

The key clicked in the lock, the door pushed open, and showed a narrow hall of rooms he knew. There was the funny old engraving—a hundred years old at least—of Mostyn Steeplechase, and there, projecting on its bracket so that the narrow hall

was made too narrow by it, stuck out at a place that made it positively dangerous, was the bust of Lord Brougham. It was all part of the furniture of his mind. So was the used carpet upon the stair. So was the curtain upon the landing. So was the very smell of the musty house and the outline of the dreary gas bracket which had been fitted with electric light. So was the dusty yellow fringe of stuff which hid the glare of the light from the eye. It was Home. It was his surroundings, the clothing of his soul. He would sleep.

"You want your rooms again?" said Thompson again, heartily.

"Yes," said Mr. Petre, stopping on the landing and leaning his hand upon the banister and bending his face downward again.

"Good Lord, man!" said his friend, "you 're not puffed by half a dozen stairs!"

"No," said Mr. Petre. "No." He groped with his hands as a man does in darkness, but it was a gesture of the mind, not of the body.

Thompson, looking at him queerly for a moment, (but most concernedly, for he loved the man), threw open the door of the room and they both went in. Mr. Petre gave a cry.

Here, came in a flood, all that had supported his

being. Here were books, each one he knew; here was the familiar dull aspect of the house opposite, here was the faded looking-glass, and, thrust into it, cards, every one of the names on which he could tell. Here was the chair; and in a rack opposite the looking-glass half a dozen pipes, to one of which he stretched out his hand mechanically. He took it and blew into its stem and was delighted to find it clear. He felt in his pocket for a pouch, and found none. There was no doubt at all that he was at home. He sat down in his own chair, and sighed like a man who has come in full of a good weariness from riding outside upon the Downs. His mind was inhabiting an island, already clear, well lit, the boundaries of which were expanding upon every side.

Yes, these were his rooms. These were his books, his pictures, new and choice, or ugly, old, familiar and inherited; there was the door of the little frowsty bedroom; but he missed something, and then suddenly said to Buffy:

"What about Billy—what about the dog?"

"Your man took him out," said Buffy.

Mr. Petre added, as though it were a most solemn thing: "I bought that dog as a puppy at Henley. You remember? You were with me. When was that?" he said sharply.

"Three years ago last June," said Thompson, looking at him curiously again. "You ought to remember that better than I do."

"I ought," said Mr. Petre humbly. "I ought, Buffy," he added, "I think I ought to sleep."

"You look as though you 'd been up; but, damn it! it isn't seven yet," said Thompson, "and I 've any amount of things to ask you. Are you tired?"

"Yes," said Mr. Petre, "I think I ought to sleep."

"Get a nap," said Buffy, stretching himself, "and I 'll wait here for you and read. Go in and get a nap, and then we can go out and dine together somewhere. I 'm dying to hear all about it."

"About what?" said Mr. Petre, his mind troubled again, and a drowsiness falling upon him.

"Why, your travels, of course," said Thompson.

"Buffy," said poor Mr. Petre again, "let me sleep. I must sleep. I won't dine. Let me sleep. Only," here he clasped Thompson's hand suddenly at the wrist with a gesture so absurdly exaggerated that his friend grew afraid, "only promise me you will come back at eight to-morrow morning, and no matter how soundly I am sleeping, promise to wake me and be with me and befriend me, Thompson. Tell my man that I am sleeping, and tell him—yes, tell him that I know where the bell is and that I

may ring, and that if I ring he is to come at once, no matter what the hour is. It rings in his room, you know. I may need him. I may need him, Thompson," he said, his voice falling to a dangerous whisper. " I remember him perfectly well. My man. Wait here till he comes in. Tell him I must sleep on."

" That 's all right," said Thompson heartily. " I 'll see to everything. Go in and sleep."

He was intrigued and bewildered, but he had plenty of sense, and he saw what was needed.

" You never had the telephone. It 's one of my grievances. I 'll send a messenger round to Chesterfield Gardens and tell them I can't come."

" Chesterfield Gardens," said Mr. Petre suddenly ; and then his troubled soul walled up again and he said, " Yes, Chesterfield Gardens. What houses ? " Thus he mumbled to himself. There was some connection in his mind with these words, " Chesterfield Gardens," which he could carry on no longer. He stumbled into the little bedroom as though he were drunk. Thompson helped him off with his clothes and into his night-shirt, saw him into bed, turned out the light, and sat anxiously in the next room until a steady snoring from within told him that the man slept as he needed to sleep.

Buffy Thompson knocked out the ashes of his pipe very gently, so as not to awaken that strange invalid—if invalid he were—filled it again, lit it, and smoked, staring at the floor with his head upon his hands.

It could not be drugs. There was nothing of that sort about Blagden at all. It certainly was not drink—drink never took a man that way. There was the sound of a door opening and shutting downstairs, and a man came in with a little dog upon a leash. Thompson went out and hushed.

"Mr. Blagden 's come back," he said. "But he 's exceedingly tired, and he must sleep. He 's sleeping now in his room. He wants you to take the dog upstairs with you, and he 'll ring if he wants you at all during the night. Don't go out, Martin. Stay in and be ready for him if he wants you—at any hour. I don't know what has happened. I am a little frightened about him."

"I had no warning, sir," said Martin.

"No, neither had I," answered Thompson. "I tell you I don't know what 's happened. Anyhow, he must sleep. If you want me, go round next door and ring up the Bolton. I shall take a room there to-night."

"It 's all very sudden, sir," said Martin.

"It is," said Thompson. "But we can do nothing till the morning."

Buffy went back, pushed the door gently open. The sleeper was still sleeping with that light snoring; his slumber was deep. He could dimly see, by the reflected light from the room without, that he had not moved. It seemed he would so sleep for hours.

Thompson went out on tiptoe down the stairs and into the street, marvelling at the things that happen in this world.

* * * * *

Mr. Petre—I mean Mr. Blagden—slept and slept. He slept fourteen hours; and when he woke the revolution within him was accomplished. Mr. Blagden, no longer Mr. Petre, had returned to this world.

But he had paid a price. That blow he had received was not without its effects and sequel. He suffered some torpor of the spirit as does the body after long maintenance of an unnatural attitude. His brain was fatigued and for the moment indifferent.

He had slept all those hours profoundly. Upon waking and seeing those accustomed walls he was back, for a few seconds, in the days, two years gone

and more, before he had left for America. He looked mechanically for clothes in the old mahogany tall-boys and found another man's. As he did so his situation came back to him at once. Buffy Thompson had his rooms. He rang for Martin.

"Martin, have you any clothes of mine or did you store them?"

"I 've got the grey suit, sir, and some ties and linen. The rest 's in the cottage at Harrington."

"All right, Martin; bring me that."

He dressed slowly, laying aside the garments of Mr. Petre and glad to find that two years had made him neither more nor less unwieldy. He approved the tie; he always wore the same kind. He approved the collar. He put watch and chain and keys and change and papers into the old regular pockets. It was a resurrection of the flesh.

Then he went into the sitting-room—they were but two, these modest ancient rooms of his on the second floor, with Martin and a boxroom up above. He sat at his desk by the window and pondered. It was half-past nine o'clock.

He sat at his desk recovering rapidly, moment by rising moment, from such weakness as a man feels after a long illness; but his mind was clear. All his boyhood, all his manhood, were before him

as they are with you and me ; the normal memory, here vivid, there imperfect, with the full personality and past of the man. He saw it all in its perspective and in its frame, and with his restoration came decision and will.

That life he had now before him had not been very eventful, it was nowhere tragic ; it had its disturbances and its troubles ; it had its few moments of petty glories and one short episode of passion.

The shock which had brought it back to him when he had come suddenly upon that friend of his youth did not exaggerate anything. It only restored. It shook him back into himself and their long acquaintance : the life of school together, and of college ; the rooms above the Cloisters in Cambridge, the winter days in which he had gone down to Devizes to stay with them, and their hunting together.

He remembered his father's death and how he had left his mother the use of Harrington, living himself between it and town. His determination, which had so grieved her, not to marry after his disappointment. He remembered those regular journeys up and down ; the station in the country town of Patcham near at hand ; the beloved accent of his own people on the platform, the beloved

West-country talk of the Patchamites. The four miles' drive home. He remembered his mother's stroke, her decline, her death, and his own grief. He remembered (an odd detail which brought a tired smile to his lips) that bad investment in Mexicans, or to be perfectly frank with himself, that bad speculation.

He remembered how Charlie Cable had unloaded upon him, and how he had trusted him because Charlie had just got into the Cabinet and was somewhat of a hero in his eyes. He remembered the letting of Harrington and his furnishing for himself the cottage outside the North Lodge and how he regretted leaving the place. He remembered the conversation with Wilkins, the family lawyer: he remembered their office, the long talks on affairs: all futile. He was himself again.

He remembered the taking of these very rooms twenty years ago and more—not so long after the Great War. He remembered his habitation of them during the two weeks of the Levantine Crisis in '39, when they were threatened with air raids and had an oddly vivid memory of walking back from the office in which he had volunteered to work, half a mile away in Whitehall, during the first warning. He remembered how strange he had

thought it was that he was not frightened—at his age. He was frightened enough a little later.

He remembered the occasion of his journey to the States twenty-eight months ago, the strange climate of New York, his days in Chicago, his disappointment at the condition of that land-venture of his ; his renewed anxieties. He even remembered his amusement at the difference between what he had thought the land would be like and what it really was. The astonishing American landscape. He vividly remembered the return, the abomination of the crossing on the great liner, the bad company, the bad food. Then came, like the shutter of a camera coming sharp down on his mind, the darkness that followed : the dead blank—the gap, in a train.

And yet he could oddly contrast his present knowledge of what he had been and was with those few months in which every surrounding experience was so strange, ugly, tortured, and the whole of his life before the accident cut away as though it had never been : his associates share-shufflers, and for society a glimpse of the abominable smart.

There was a duality in his vision of these last few months that made him shudder as though his present memory, revived and sane, was living side

by side with that vile period in which he was himself and yet not himself. But the mood did not last long. There was too much comedy to relieve it.

He travelled along each episode. He saw step by step the prodigious increase of fortune, and in spite of his weakness he could have laughed aloud. He, the permanently embarrassed, had had a dream of millions, evil millions. He could sit still no longer at the desk. He stood up and steadied himself by the mantelpiece, and did laugh slightly at last. As he did so, the recent reality of stocks and deals and sales which had stood apart in his mind as an ended, exceptional episode returned as an enormity: he was *now*, he was *still*, an immensely wealthy man.

He began to realise it. He, standing there in that cosy, shabby room which was part of himself; he, Peter Blagden of Harrington, a poor gentleman, insufficiently provided, embarrassed — had an immense lump of money; over three million pounds.

What it would mean to him; what he would do with his opportunities; whether indeed he desired to do anything with them (he did not think he did, unless it were to travel—anywhere except across the Atlantic) troubled him little. What he chuckled over was the high comedy of this immense

fortune in his hands. He looked round the little dusty room, the dear little familiar room of twenty years, all telling of his modest (and declining, encumbered) country gentleman's income, of his lineage, of his affections, most of them now with the dead; he remembered the Bank Parlour and he laughed again, aloud. He had for a moment the boyish impulse to do something really amusing—to go out there and then, that morning, pick up a telephone and give some critical order which should shake a wobbling market. He might sell half a million Moulters, and wreck them; Lord! What fun! He held his head back to laugh once more, but his weakness came upon him again and he sank down into his chair.

Martin knocked at the door; his visage recalled to Mr. Blagden an imperative precaution.

"Martin," he said, "my name is Blagden—Peter Blagden. Isn't it?"

"Yes, sir—of course, sir." Nor did Martin flinch. He was of country training and had feudal knowledge that gentlemen were free to be quite unaccountable if they chose.

"Does our landlord know that I 'm back?"

"No, sir."

"Well then, Martin, don't tell him. I 'll slip out

when he 's away and, Martin, *don't tell anyone:* not for a day or two. I 'll tell you when you may, quite soon."

"Yes, sir. Very good. Will you have your breakfast now, sir," he said, "or will you wait till Mr. Thompson comes?"

"Is Thompson coming?" asked Mr. Petre, gratefully.

"Yes, sir," said Martin. "He told me he would be here at ten, and it 's striking now."

"Then I will wait for Mr. Thompson," said Mr. Blagden—who was also Mr. Petre when the thought of the Bank came back to him and brought up that smile again—"I will wait for Mr. Thompson, and we will breakfast together, Martin. What is there for breakfast?" he added sharply.

"I got kippers," said Martin, in a voice which years had rendered part of his master's life. "I had to use my judgment, sir, and you were always fond of kippers."

"I was," said Mr. Blagden, in deeper and more religious tones than he had yet used; and he added, "I was and am again. Indeed, I was fond of them in between, and I ought to have remembered why. But I didn't Martin, I didn't."

"No, sir," said that excellent man, amenable to the absurdities of his lord.

"I should have known it all the time, Martin," said Mr. Blagden. "It's curious I didn't know anything all the time."

"Yes, sir," said Martin.

* * * * *

Buffy Thompson came in; tall, bustling, his hair in all its native fuzz and his eyes dancing. He began a torrent of questions. But Blagden stopped him with a question that made him gape.

"You haven't told anyone that I'm back?"

"No. . . . No one—but why the Hell you . . ."

"Well: *don't tell anyone.* Martin's got those orders. I've the very best reasons. It won't last long. But it's *absolutely essential.* Have you got that?"

Buffy Thompson was unused to the American phrase.

"Got what?" he asked.

"I mean, will you promise?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then we'll talk."

Over the breakfast-table Peter Blagden told the hardly believable tale, and Buffy Thompson believed.

"I'm going to put it boldly into the one stock that won't turn a hair," he ended; "I'm going to buy

New Bearer Loan." He turned up the last page of the morning paper Martin had brought—the accustomed one, the *Messenger*. "99–8½ . . . about 3 months to mature. There 'll be an odd 40,000 pounds or so." Buffy Thompson was awed at such nonchalance—it was uncanny. "I 'll transfer it to current account in the bank at Patcham—in my own name." He suddenly got up. "I can't wait, Buffy, I 'm on wires. You won't mind helping me in a little business matter?"

"No," said Buffy, "all in reason."

"Oh! It 'll be all in reason, never fear. Now take your hat and stick and come with me."

They drove to that Branch Bank which should be famous in the annals of Banking. Together they passed the swing doors. Together they stood as Mr. Blagden—Mr. Petre, I mean—addressed Moonface with a firm courtesy. Together they were conducted through the carpeted corridor, past the three engravings, together they entered the Sacred Cell. Mr. Petre introduced, "My dear sir, this is my friend Mr. Palling Thompson." They all bowed. No flies were on Mr. Petre that morning. He knew his own mind at last.

"By all means, Mr. Petre, by all means. Ah! And for the purpose . . .?"

"One moment." Mr. Petre pulled out a small vellum-bound book from his pocket. "Yes . . . £3,273,764 6s. 2d. There are no cheques outstanding. I am about to draw £264 6s. 2d. That leaves £3,273,500."

The obvious truth needed no reply.

"Now, my dear sir," Mr. Petre went on with calm decision, "the New National Bearer Bonds are at 98½ this morning? They were that yesterday."

The Manager rang and asked for the sheet. It came flimsy and large; he put on his spectacles too slowly and confirmed. Yes. 98⅜, ½.

"In what denominations can they be bought?"

The Manager smiled.

"Well, my dear sir—surely it is immaterial?—Some are high—for convenience of transport or what not—it's a great innovation. Really! If you'd told anyone even twenty years ago . . ."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr. Petre, "what's the highest denomination?"

"Well, really, £10,000, I think."

"I should like to see one," said Mr. Petre, "if you have one in the place."

The Manager rang and the glorious thing appeared—presented in a Morrison folder.

Mr. Petre took it out and handled it with curiosity and interest.

It was printed on one of those new metal sheets which they make the notes of nowadays, and which, they tell us, will replace all paper in the long run; thin, stronger, even lighter; 500 to the inch—almost like the India paper of the old late nineteenth-century books, only not quite so flimsy.

It wasn't ugly—for an official thing; about eighteen inches by twenty-four and all the little coupons very neat.

Mr. Petre held it up to the light and got absorbed in the grain and the Royal Arms. Then he remembered his business and put it down again.

Mr. Petre asked for a sheet of note-paper and murmured as he wrote thereon: "Please buy me 320 £10,000 nominal National Bearer Bonds at current price, this date. The balance of my account pay in to the account of Mr. Peter Blagden, of Harrington, in the Empire Bank, Patcham Branch," and he signed boldly "John K. Petre."

He looked up and spoke: "I want those bills put . . ." he began. "No! I 'll add it in writing."

He murmured again: "P.S.—Please put the securities so purchased into a secure receptacle and keep them against my coming"—"What 's

to-day? Tuesday. I'll come on Friday" — "against my coming on Friday next, the 22nd at 11 a.m., when I shall take them with me.—J. K. P." "There!" he added in the tone of a man who has paid a small bill promptly, and with a pleasant smile he handed it to the Man of Affairs.

That Manager was dumb. The blow had fallen. The golden dream was over. But it had to come. It might have come at any moment in all those weeks. The Formidable Eccentric ever acted in some such lightning fashion. Doubtless (or, at any rate, pray Heaven) he would return. He had been most courteously treated. He should retain a good memory of their continued courtesy.

"By all means, Mr. Petre, by all means." The Manager swallowed twice. "At eleven on Friday."

There was no more to be said. There was nothing more to be done.

* * * * *

"Buffy," said Mr. Blagden, when they were in the street, and the odd £264 6s. 2d safe in pocket, "Don't you want to come on with me? I've only got two things more to do—one in the Temple. Then we'll lunch.

"All right," said Buffy.

Mrs. Malton was scrubbing when they entered. She staggered up to her weary feet, bobbed and apologised.

"Mrs. Malton," said her employer abruptly, "you are a good woman. Now listen to me," as she would have protested, "I 'm leaving. I 'm paying my rent now. At the office. This morning." Mrs. Malton's eyes filled with tears. "The van will come for this furniture to-morrow. Be here to see that it is loaded. It 's going down to Dorset. No, don't interrupt. Here is five pounds. Are you married ?"

Mrs. Malton said that she was a widow. He asked her if she had children. There were two living : one in the Army, and the other married down Hackney way.

"Mrs. Malton, if you are well advised you will arrange your affairs at home, and take the train from Waterloo Station to a place called Patcham. If you are well advised you will take the train to-day week at ten in the morning, and at Patcham you shall be met ; and there you shall be shown my house and certain duties attached to it. And if it suits you, you can stay."

Mrs. Malton made no terms. Nor did it occur to her that virtue could be rewarded in this world.

For in her station of life reward is unknown, as is in higher stations virtue. She simply thought that God, in Whom she believed (for she had been brought up in a very old-fashioned way on the lonely edge of an Essex march) had sent Mr. Petre with a gift, and in her philosophy that was not reward but good luck.

Her employer turned to go, and then suddenly remembered.

"Mrs. Malton, when you get to Patcham, you must not ask for me as Mr. Petre. You must ask for me as Mr. Blagden. I am Mr. Blagden now. Good-bye."

Mrs. Malton, returning to her task, mused on the common madness of the wealthy, and humbly thanked Heaven for her good fortune.

Peter Blagden took Thompson with him as he settled for the rent, gave the order for the moving of the furniture, and the address, went back to his rooms; sent Martin down to meet the furniture at Harrington, bade him be back on Thursday without fail, and then disappeared into that happy inn of his, with Thompson attendant. By ten of the Friday he was back in London; by eleven precisely, after a heavy struggle with his nerves, he was at the door of the Bank, in a good roomy motor, hired from Rimington's over the river.

A box of steel, burnished, about two feet and a half by two, lined with some dull bronze metal, and having a curious set of three fastenings of a sort he had never seen before, was awaiting him. There was a swing handle at either end. A man could lift it easily enough. The printed securities it contained, each batch just like the last, were handed out with the reverent care which a superstitious age might have shown to the body of a saint; they were in three thin flat bundles of 100 each, tied and docketed; and twenty over.

The solemn process of verifying the printed numbers by tens was to begin when Mr. Petre—in a last eccentricity at which, for all his thought of the future, the Banker could hardly refrain from protesting—had them all put back.

"I 'll take it as read," he said. "All I want to understand is these locks."

The simple, the ingenious mechanism was explained, and when cordial farewells had somewhat raised the hearts of the mourners who were to remain thus widowed, a menial bore the box away in train of the millionaire, the last poor corpse of an immortal episode, and put it into the roomy motor at its master's feet. So went a little more—a trifle of one or two odd one hundred thousands more—than

three million pounds through Guildford to Alton, where they lunched late and took the air.

At Alton Mr. Petre bought a good strong sack and corded it about the box. At Winchester he stopped for the night, paid off the car, and dined well with Thompson. As for the sacking parcel, it went up to his room with his luggage. Next morning Mr. Petre hired a standing rotor cab himself in the street, standing by it to see that none should speak to its chauffeur. His luggage was put within and without, and he and Buffy, whom he had asked to pay the bill, drove to Lymington. The taxi was paid off with its return fare, and Mr. Petre had the satisfaction of seeing it go off without comment or converse.

He and his companion lunched. After lunch Thompson went out, saying that all might hear, "I 'm sure I can get something," and sure enough, in an hour he was back with a little old-fashioned trap, still surviving, and a venerable horse, his purchases, for they designed to tour the forest. They put their few things aboard and the small sacking case which held some camping kit and off they went ; so slowly that the children jeered at them as the old horse wheezed along.

The Forest was divine with Autumn ; they drove

on alone, exploring its views. One night Mr. Petre took out those bonds and made a nice brown-paper parcel of them, leaving the metal box empty. But he took it carefully along. They turned the old horse's head westward toward the Dorset border.

They took it easy. They made their twelve or fourteen miles in a day, all leisurely, nor in a direct line. On the fifth day, from a hill-top, they saw before them in its vale the happy roofs of Harrington, its belfry, the sober grey of Blagden's House beyond the trees, and slowly their voyage ended at the cottage by the North Lodge.

The heavy camping kit was lifted in. Then the rest. The ramshackle old trap put away in a barn behind a farm cart. They would not need it for some time. It had only been for the forest, said Mr. Blagden. The old horse found a good stable and the much-enduring man his home.

He was released. He had given the slip to that incredible world of shuffling and of falsehood and of cozening, of vain gambling and snatching and open robbery which pretends, in our toppling moment, to govern mankind. So long as the State was secure he was secure; he had his money out at usury, but to one debtor only, the Government of his country; better investment he could not find.

He was washed of all the slime of evil acquaintance as he was rid of all that terror and perplexity and agony of nothingness which had poisoned the spring and summer of '53.

But the gigantic sum in the locked cupboard of his bedroom above less affected him than the doubling of his insufficient revenue two years before would have done. He desired nothing but his old friends, his home and the peaceful passage of age, and these were now secure.

It did not take him ten days to put the simple trials of his earlier life to rights. The small sums —to him now small—very large to the recipients, which were needed to give him an immediate occupation of the old place, to give the mortgagees compensation for his haste, he had sacrificed, as he would have sacrificed a sixpence. And only the clerks in the Patcham Branch of the Empire Bank knew about it. Mr. Blagden, of Harrington Hall, had done famously in America. He had made a deal with the great John K. Petre, and netted close on £50,000.

As for the American land, Mr. Blagden had cabled to London that power was following by mail to let it go. His agent there could sell or let 'em foreclose, just as he willed. He was indifferent; he only

desired to hear no more of it. He had visited the old place and strolled round its gardens, pleased with everything, except to note this or that slight disorder, this or that slight mark of an alien presence now vanished. He had recalled in a flood the years of his childhood and of his early manhood. He had made friends of every chair and table and picture and book. He was bathed in content.

He retained his rooms in St. James's Place. He was used to them, they suited him, he wanted no more. Here was a good end to life. What would he do with the inordinate excess ? He should put it somewhere apart from him so that he should not be troubled by the violence of men, or even by their needs beyond reason.

He was bathed in content ; and mighty peace had spread her wings again over a world new blessed.

CHAPTER X

And mighty Peace had spread her wings again over a world new blessed?

Not at all. Far from it!

When they have a holiday in Heaven they suck it out to the last half-minute, and beyond if they can; for Heaven has been hard-worked since the Fall, and play is precious to it.

That merry Daemon to whom Mr. Petre had been handed over for a plaything still had a few days to disport himself—a few minutes, as they call them in Heaven—and he was not going to waste them. He wasn't going to drop his toy till Higher Powers should come and take it from him. Not he! Mr. Petre was still for it.

* * * * *

In that same great Rotor boat which had brought the new millionaire and his fortune to Plymouth upon that April day, these five months agone, was borne to the shores of Europe a real old millionaire, a matured one.

Mr. Batterby had been perfectly right. That real old millionaire, that matured one, had indeed taken the same boat; and his name *was* quite certainly and without ambiguity, and without problem, and without mystery or miracle, John Kosciusko Petre. But with a charming modesty he had taken his ticket and registered under the name of Carroll. It secured him isolation; a thing he prized. For John Kosciusko Petre (who never wasted a moment of his waking hours—they were eighteen, for he only slept six) knew himself to be the target of innumerable arrows, the desired prey of a million ravenous appetites, the flesh at which a host of claws throughout the world were clutching, and he built round himself a wall of secrecy. It had been his rule for years. When he was off and away no man should know where he might be; save when, at rare intervals, he cabled a code word during his travels, awaited the reply, and then moved off again. In these annual bouts of leisure John Kosciusko Petre improved his mind, and he read, and read, and read, and read, and read. He had already read in this vacation all George Eliot, all Dickens, all Hardy, all Meredith, and a literal translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by Homer, and he was now half-way through the works of William Shakespeare. He had

begun with the poems, and he was rapidly nearing the end of *Henry V*. Tennyson was yet to come—oddly enough.

John Kosciusko Petre was a man nearly seventy years of age, and looked fifty or ninety as you felt inclined. His skin was of fine vellum, drawn strongly over strong bones, with not much in between. And he had neither eyebrows nor eyelashes, which was an economy. His eyes gave nothing away, and in this they were unlike his hands, which, for thirty years past, had been giving away wholesale and in the oddest fashion—public baths, and food in famine areas, and funds for the observation of seismological phenomena—earthquakes that was—and splendid collections to museums, and one model University, complete in every detail, and even including a Papist among its professors: the professor of Mismatices. It was the first University of that Mountain State, and large enough to train all its youth of all its sexes, in all the higher departments of learning. He was tall, bald, as strong and energetic as any man twenty years his junior. He was silent, and prided himself on being silent; and he prided himself also on this, that he never had a suit of clothes built for him in his life, but had always bought what was necessary from the hook.

As for his blood, it was very good. He knew his ancestry right away back a good deal longer than most people do who boast of blood in Europe. And it was good blood, for those who prefer the blood of New England. Nor was there poverty in his lineage, nor, until his own opportunities had come, great wealth; but whether he was of the English Petres or not he could not have told you, for he did not pretend to go back beyond the mid-seventeenth century. But he was as old as that.

As for his names, he had been called John after his grandfather, who had farmed in New Hampshire, and was a very honest man; and Kosciusko from a hero of that grandfather, of whom that grandfather had read in a book of excerpts (called *A Thousand Gems of Poetry*) that Freedom had shrieked when Koskiusko had had the misfortune to fall. Nor was his grandfather aware what horrid superstitions that hero had followed in religion, or he perhaps would have been less devoted. At any rate, Kosciusko had the baby been called, nearly seventy years ago, for his middle name. Hence the K.

Mr. John Kosciusko Petre—John K. as he was affectionately known—travelled with no valet; and therein he was wise. Where he was wiser still was

that he travelled with a man who did his work for him, and whom he paid a very high salary indeed. You may call him a Private Secretary, or a Confidential Secretary if you will, but John Kosciusko did not give him these titles, he called him simply "My Clurk," and this attendant was devoted and efficient in such a degree, that you would not believe it if you saw it in a book.

It was his business never to approach John Kosciusko until he was summoned; he travelled second in boat and train in Europe when John Kosciusko travelled first; in the States he went Pullman as his master did, but not in the same drawing-room reservation. He kept all letters, papers, figures—everything—orderly in his mind; with a free hand to organise what sized office he willed, and what bureaucracy he chose for the maintenance of all this; and to spend at large for keeping in touch, and having everything in order.

So did John Kosciusko arrange his life. And the Daemon had even arranged that John Kosciusko should come on deck well muffled up, and gaze without too much interest upon the town of Plymouth while that other gentleman stepped ashore towards his fate. For John Kosciusko was bound for

Cherbourg and would land among the French, whose civilisation he affected more than he did that of the English, though blaming the Gauls in certain points, and particularly in their plumbing, their religion, and their lack of their religion ; all which three things he disapproved. Of all the Gauls he chiefly relaxed in the district of Touraine, and on the Coast of Azure. Upon this last, indeed, he had a set of rooms kept for him permanently, though he visited them but once in two years at the oftenest.

So in that happy springtime John Kosciusko wandered. A contract motor of sufficient size met him at Cherbourg. Once more did he survey the castles of the Loire, once more the conservatories of the Riviera.

It was his glory that in these vacations (though he lost not a moment and continued to read ; Shakespeare was finished long before he had gutted Chinon and Tennyson was polished off and Thackeray was passing along the belt to the Receiver) he put business on one side. The clurk saw to that. But my Daemon, having need of him, quite instantly jerked him out of his repose.

The weather was torrid, as September in France can be, the same weather in which, half a lifetime before, and more, the German armies had marched

upon Paris; and John Kosciusko, reading yesterday's *Matin* in the town of Angers (where he found himself in his progress north to the coast), read a paragraph which he would certainly not have read in any English paper; and, reading it, wondered whether he were alive or dead.

It was plain French, and he could read plain French well enough. There would have seemed, to anyone else, nothing very startling in the news. It was a commonplace story of modern speculation, and described in the light French manner how a big Rotor merger had taken place in London that summer and how its monopoly was virtually established by the Government decision to adopt the Combine system in the ports and on board the King's ships as well as in the Postal System; and how the Dominions had followed suit.

But it was not these first few lines which had knocked John Kosciusko sideways; it was the last three. They ran:

"It is the secret of Punchinello that the soul of this affair, of one so large *envergure*, is but that John K. Petre, the man of fantastic millions, who is of passage at London, seems it, and of whom one talks currently in the best clubs of the Bond Street and of the Strand . . ."

John Kosciusko Petre put the paper down on the little marble table on the café where he sat, spread it out with two large bony hands, and fixed upon the ill-conditioned print of the French journal those steel spectacles, that firm and concentrated gaze, which were his marks.

He registered every word. He felt a duty to take some immediate decision, but he could not decide what the decision was to be. He could not decide decisively, as decisions should be decided. For once in his life he was flummoxed. Then—for our millionaires are men of rapid conclusions, that is why they now and then die poor—the corners of his mouth drew down ; he had solved the problem. During that long vacuity of his in France he had been impersonated in London. His clurk should have known of this !

He pulled forth a little knife, rather blunt, and slowly cut out the offending paragraph. He unscrewed his big black Waterman pen and wrote on it in the bold American hand "7/10/53." He blotted it with the vile French blotting paper, frowned to see it blurred, folded it carefully, and put it into a cheap leather wallet which he had carried for over forty years. He was still angry against the clurk. But he was a just man, and reflected under

what difficulties of a foreign language and of slow communication that very efficient young man had kept up communications during all these months of travel; and he acquitted him. But he must consult with him, and he went back to the hotel.

There was not a day to be lost. They could not make the night boat at Havre, but they could catch the morning Air Mail from Paris if they motored through the night; and motor through the night that old man of iron did; sleeping with arms crossed as he tore through the warm air. He took the earliest of the three air services, and by the time that he and his companion were at the Splendide it was the younger man who was tired out, not the elder. As he registered the clerk hesitated. John Kosciusko pulled him up sharply and said: "What 's the matter now?" in tones which were of metal and startled the lounge.

"Well, sir . . ." said the clerk.

"That 's my name, ain't it?" said John Kosciusko, showing an envelope. And the clerk succumbed. But his head was going round. How many John K. Petre's were there in this wicked world?

Then with no deliberation, at once, the wires were set to work. The agencies which the clurk held in the hollow of his hand, the points on the map of

Central London where he could press a button, the centres from which money could work anything, whatever it willed, all buzzed ; all the wheels went round.

And upon the morning of the third day John Kosciusko, who had kept strictly to himself all the time, never so much as leaving his rooms, receiving the reports, co-ordinating them, mastering the thing like a man of thirty-five, and a genius in staff work at that—on the morning of the third day, I say, the whole thing was before him, shaken into shape, and presented as lucidly as a good diagram. He had got it all.

Five months ago, on the 3rd of April (the very day, by gosh ! that he himself had looked on Plymouth before he had landed at Cherbourg !) a man of such and such appearance, perhaps twenty years younger than himself, utterly different from himself, stout, grey, in the early fifties (some said he might be American, and some said he might be English) had impersonated him in that very hotel, the Splendide. He had crossed the tracks of those very agencies, apparently to find out what the real John K. was doing and where he might be. He had moved to rooms in the Temple. He had lunched and dined at such and such a house ;

he had been the constant associate of one Terrard, of Blake and Blake, Brokers on 'Change in the City of London, and he had had the gall to make good!

It was said that he had begun with a deal in some stock. One line of inquiries made sure it was French African stock, but another that it was a Bear account in the External Loan. Anyhow, immediately after, he had bought the Paddenham Site and then sold it to the Government for some ten million dollars. Then he had gone in with the Trefusis crowd at fifty-fifty; but about three weeks after the Contract had gone through with the Commons he had sold out. What he had done after this it was too soon to know, as it was only a few days before; but he had gone out with half the capital. He had not been frozen out, or anything of that kind. He had it good and tight, mayhap in National Bonds.

John Kosciusko was in such a cold anger that the parchment of his skin showed white. For men of that energy can be very angry indeed, at and beyond their seventieth year.

The next thing—and it was all done the same morning—was an interview with the lawyer—the only lawyer whom he trusted on this side, and whom

he had good reason to trust, for John Kosciusko had a method of his own, not only his lawyers, but with his doctors; not only with his doctors, but with the humble watchers, who saw to it that his rest was not disturbed by undue sounds. He paid them all regularly and largely; but the payments stopped dead when the service failed in the least point, and during his slightest indisposition the steady and satisfactory income of three excellent practitioners ceased suddenly; to resume as suddenly when John K. could honestly say he felt himself again.

The lawyer asked for a little time to turn the matter over. He was not given that time. He was told to decide, and he decided, naturally enough, that there was matter for fees—I mean for an Action. The dreadful Kosciusko forbade the ordinary courtesies, of warning, of acceptance.

Therefore it was that on the morning of the 15th of September a chirping young man in a rather dirty collar popped his head into St. James's Place, put a not too clean envelope into Mr. Peter Blagden's hand, uttered a few cabalistic words, and went out sideways. Mr. Blagden (of Harrington), opening the missive, was agreeably surprised to find a document partly in print, and partly in writing, and all in an

In the High Court of Justice. 1953.—No. 42.

KING'S BENCH DIVISION.

Between

John Koskiusko Petre

PLAINTIFF

AND

Peter Charles Tamporley Blagden

DEFENDANT

George the Fifth, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, To

Peter Charles Tamporley Blagden

of *Harrington Hall, Harrington*

in the *County* of *Dorset*

WE COMMAND YOU, That within Eight Days after the Service of this Writ on you, inclusive of the day of such Service, you do cause an Appearance to be entered for you in an Action at the Suit of

John Koskiusko Petre

And take Notice, that in default of your so doing, the Plaintiff may proceed therein, and Judgment may be given in your absence.

Witness, ERMYNTRUDE VISCOUNTESS BOOLE, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, the *fifteenth* day of *September*, in the year of Our Lord One thousand nine hundred and *fifty-three*.

N.B.—This Writ is to be served within TWELVE Calendar Months from the date thereof, or, if renewed, within SIX Calendar Months from the date of the last renewal, including the day of such date, and not afterwards.

The Defendant may appear hereto by entering Appearance , either personally or by Solicitor, at the Central Office, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London.

If the Defendant fail to deliver a defence within TEN Days after the last day of the time limited for Appearance, he may have Judgment entered against *him* without notice, unless he has in the meantime been served with a Summons for Judgment or for Directions.

English of its own which ran, or rather hobbled, as opposite.

Mr. Blagden stared hopelessly at this rigmarole. Why this solicitude of his Sovereign for his old false self? Why this peremptory, this tyrannical summons from a Monarch whom he had loyally served on the Commission of the Peace during so prolonged and prosperous a reign?

He happened to turn the sheet over. On the other side was a line of print followed by writing:

THE PLAINTIFF'S CLAIM IS

For damages for impersonation of the Plaintiff in connection with financial and commercial transactions conducted in his name without his consent.

This Writ was issued by *Jacob King*

of 16 *Flag Buildings, Inner Temple*

whose Address for Service is 16 *Flag Buildings, Inner Temple*

Solicitor for the said Plaintiff , who resides at *The Hotel Splendide.*

Mr. Blagden read this document three times over: first mechanically, noting only the larger printed words; then still more mechanically, noting nothing at all; lastly, with a concentrated attention, closely following every syllable of the Royal harshness to his Liege and puzzled at the reappearance of that address "The Hotel Splendide." Could there be

some mistake? Could he be claiming damages against himself?

He had not yet the habits of his new rank in our plutocracy. He did not summon his secretary, for he had none. He did not even send for a messenger, for it was not in his habits to afford such luxuries. He simply sat and wondered what men did under worries of this kind.

Then he bethought him of the dear old family lawyer, Mr. Wilkins.

Everything belonging to that real life of his—better, for all its troubles than the mad episode of fortune—was to Mr. Blagden now at once very distinct and very small, like a picture looked at through one of these diminishing glasses which the block makers use to decide on the effect of a wash drawing when it shall be reduced to scale. The image of Mr. Wilkins stood out thus exceedingly sharp and yet still remote. It was Mr. Wilkins who had presided over the steady decline of his mother's income and his own. It was Mr. Wilkins who had drawn a substantial income from loyal work performed for a dozen such families of the declining gentry—clients inherited from his worthy father and grandfather; for it was a fine old firm. It was Mr. Wilkins who had given him every possible

piece of advice—on legal technicalities always accurate, on policy always bad—since he had come of age. To Mr. Wilkins he now turned. He remembered the telephone number well enough, and considered curiously within himself what a strange thing this faculty of memory must be, that not only faded, but could be wholly exiled, and then could present the past again with all the violent reality of immediate things.

As he waited for the answer on the machine it struck him that Mr. Wilkins might be dead. He was twelve years older than Mr. Blagden, and an absence of twenty-eight months is a gap. To his joy he heard the same clerk's familiar voice answering with the same irritability it had invariably answered with in the old days, he heard the familiar formula when he had given his name, that he would be put through to Mr. Wilkins ; and at last he heard once more the familiar tones of the principal, still clear in his sober age. They wasted very little time in greetings. Mr. Wilkins was free ? Mr. Blagden would go round now, at once.

An old association of more than thirty years endeared the two men to each other ; money lost upon the one side and gained upon the other was a further bond.

Mr. Wilkins heard patiently the details; of the sudden loss of memory, the name Petre, the financial dealings, the writ. He showed not the faintest surprise at any part of the extraordinary story of lost identity (which he entirely disbelieved), he jotted down dates and then gave tongue.

He used the customary string of technicalities, to each of which was attached a customary payment. He took for granted, in that clear-cut professional manner which was part of his job, that his client had done something quite amazingly astute; that he had been running very close to the wind. He felt a strong professional admiration for so much daring and skill. Who would have expected it of Peter Blagden? He changed his tone to one of conversation and said:

"My dear Mr. Peter" (Mr. Blagden heard that formal familiarity of Harrington with a double recognition—of old days, and of the past fevered months), "my dear Mr. Peter, if the interests involved were not so very large, I should advise an arrangement. But seeing what those interests are" (and, he added to himself, the considerable fees that can be milked out of them), "it is worth your while to fight. There can be no question about the profit on Touaregs. No hurt was suffered there. Nor of the purchase and sale of land; you were free to transact

it under any trade name. The only doubtful ground is the Rotor affair."

"I have no anxiety to go on with that," said Mr. Blagden wearily. "None at all."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Wilkins, shocked, "do consider what you are saying! Two millions! More than two millions!"

"I assure you I mean it," said Mr. Blagden sincerely and simply. "What on earth does a man want with more than sixty thousand a year? I've got that now, apart from all this last detestable nonsense."

The image of Mr. Trefusis rose in his mind and nauseated him; for the morbid mood of those last days remained as a strong impression, although he was now back again in his right mind. Doubtless had he met the Great Organiser again in his new condition he would have respected him as highly as did, and still does, all our business world. But he had met him in days of mental torture and warping, and the picture was distorted.

"Why, bless you, Mr. Wilkins," went on Mr. Blagden, with more assurance than he would have shown before the older man in his former days of poverty, "all I want is peace. And if a man can't have leisure on £60,000 a year . . ."

"Less taxes," broke in Mr. Wilkins anxiously. "Less taxes, my dear Mr. Peter!"

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Blagden wearily. "But if a man cannot have leisure on, say, £30,000 pounds a year, he 's not likely to get it. What do I want with another quarter million or so of income?"

Mr. Wilkins' age did not impair his rapidity of decision and his power for an immediate change of front; for here habit was strong. He at once went off upon a new tack.

"Have you considered, Mr. Peter," he said solemnly, and Mr. Blagden was back again in his twenty-first year, listening to the solemn admonitions of the Family Lawyer in the old study at home, "have you considered what the effect will be upon your whole position? What people will say of your motives, Mr. Peter?" And here he leaned forward and tapped Mr. Blagden on the knee. "The Paddenham Site purchase was made under that other name also. Remember that! No doubt they won't go into it, but remember what it means! If you let them take it into court it will make you talked about, that 's true; but it may clear you."

Peter Blagden was struck with the full force of that argument, and he felt the blood going to his face.

The lawyer continued: "No, Mr. Peter, the more I think of it, the more I see that you must fight it."

"But if I fight it with the truth," said Blagden,

"all the miserable humiliating business comes out. I shall be known as a man who has lapses of memory; a deficient; an absurdity."

Mr. Wilkins did not understand the objection.

"Why not?" said he. "The only objection is that it 's a poor defence."

"I won't have it," said Mr. Blagden, with sudden fierceness. "I won't have it. D'you understand?"

For the whole of thirty-two years Mr. Wilkins had had no experience of such a mood, either in this client or in any other. At first he was prepared to wrestle with it; then he thought of the vast interests involved, and he gave way; instead of replying, he pondered within himself for a moment.

"It can't help coming out, Mr. Peter," he said at last. "Supposing you say that you used the name at random, and had never heard of John K. Petre; do you suppose anybody will believe you? And even if they did believe you, do you suppose you could convince a Court of Justice that you were having all these opportunities given to you for love? The first quarter of an hour's examination of any one of your witnesses, the first five minutes of an arbitrator . . . and whether you won or lost, you would be branded."

Mr. Blagden suffered. He was in a cleft stick; he suffered more when he heard a further remark

from the lawyer—not very original, a piece of human wisdom as old as any fossil monkey's skull; but ancient wisdom has an amazing force when it falls pat.

"Every decision in life," said the older man, "is a choice between two evils, and there is no doubt which is the worst evil here. You want peace. You can get it if you tell them this—" (he had almost slipped out the words "Cock-and-bull story" but he had caught himself in time)—"this misfortune of yours. You will have an unfortunate and strange incident remembered of you, but nothing affecting your honour. If you take the other line, at the very best you will be shown up as a swindler in every newspaper in the world; and at the worst . . . well, I don't like to go on."

But Mr. Blagden had recovered his fierce determination.

"No!" he said, "I *won't*. I'll make an arrangement."

"And if they won't take it?" said the lawyer.

There was a silence—luckily for Peter Blagden's future happiness he was the first to break it; the Daemon had suggested with his supernatural vision just what was needed, and had slid it into Mr. Blagden's heart: "I never said I was John K. Petre. I never alluded to one act of John K. Petre's life," he said slowly; "it was thrust upon me. I'll

give reasons—good reasons, I 'll find 'em—for not wishing to have my own name come out. I 'll swear —and it 's the truth—it was a chance name ; I 'll swear I knew nothing of John K. Petre the millionaire ; and I 'll let 'em believe what they like. I *won't* have my humiliation published. I *won't*. If the lawyers insist, my own evidence will break them. Go to this man's lawyers and tell him I 'll compromise. I 'll take any terms they offer."

Poor Mr. Wilkins saw vast receipts from a most juicy Action fade away. He sighed and accepted his fate.

* * * * *

As I draw near to the conclusion of this simple story I review in my mind the little army of those who had done well out of Mr. John K. Petre's—I mean Mr. Peter Blagden's—little adventure, and I conclude that Providence orders all things together for good.

An economist, perhaps, might tell you who had provided these various windfalls. I cannot. But I mark that Charlie Terrard was now established for life and precariously married to his Dada ; that Mr. Charlbury would in the next honours list be Sir Marmaduke Charlbury (he had dropped his original Christian name), and had already bought that fine old Jacobean country house which I have not had the leisure to describe for you ; that the

hard-faced man in the Court off Broad Street had retired upon a small, but for him, excellent competence; that at least fifteen of the hangers-on round the Paddenham Site had collared from one or two hundred up to five hundred; that Williams, intermediary grasper of the Paddenham Site, had been saved—certainly from bankruptcy, possibly from prison, and was now sunning himself in Madeira planning a new coup (for you cannot teach wisdom to such men); that the innumerable new Debenture holders in the Trefusis reconstruction of B.A.R.'s were not disappointed in their steady eight per cent.; that the ordinary shares still crept upwards; that even the little people of that distant luncheon table had pocketed their little packets safely; that Mrs. Cyril had been able to cover the silly old Victorian walls of her house with brand-new pictures which looked as if they had been painted by a lunatic in hell, and to stuff it with chairs and tables like the inside of a German philosopher's mind; that the kind old Cabinet Minister had a little more to leave to his nephews, and even the two ex-Lord Chancellors had for a brief moment enjoyed a few extra hundreds, which they had lost (and a little more) through a combined speculation in Virtue Deeps, to which they had been emphatically recommended by a friend of prominent South African type.

I said just now that I could not tell you who had provided all these sums; but upon consideration it seems to me that they can only have been provided by the British taxpayer at large. The burden was therefore distributed over the widest possible field and nothing more equitable could be imagined.

* * * * *

An arrangement had been proposed—even to the sacrifice of the proceeds of Mr. Blagden's sale of B.A.R.'s ordinary; it was refused. John K. Petre wasn't out to add to his fifty millions a paltry two. He was out for blood.

Counsel's opinion had been taken, experts called in, documents of every kind drawn up, written, engrossed, typed, filed, stamped, endorsed, docketed, and in general treated to the excellently elaborate and lucrative ritual which documents in such cases uncomplainingly suffer; pleadings had been entered, several consultations enjoyed, briefs marked, tremendous leaders chosen. Everything had been done upon Mr. Blagden's side to swell the costs to the largest possible figure; and that is the test of sincere and conscientious work on the part of a man's legal advisers. Upon John K. Petre's side the same process had been even more thoroughly and conscientiously performed. In his own country the Rotor King — I mean Baron — would have

known how to check these figures; here under the immemorial traditions of the English Courts, he was helpless. But his relentless humour tolerated any extravagance, so only that he might drink deep of vengeance.

The case was set down for October the 20th. It came before Mr. Justice Honeybubble. Its importance as a precedent, and the fees—a record, as the American Press was careful to call them—were checks upon undue haste.

Nine times the space that measures day and night to mortal man did those lawyers on the floor grind guineas out of the great John K. Petre mill. Then the lawyer perched up above them talked for half a day more, and after that the judgment. The decision fell for the Defendants. Mr. John K. Petre, of Summit, Merryvale, in New Hampshire, one of the United States of North America, failed to recover.

Nor was the Defendant subjected to the necessity of disproving impersonation, though he was prepared in evidence clearly and firmly to swear that he had no such intention, but had had thrust upon him a chance name at a moment when he did not desire to do business under his own. *That* point—which had loomed so large before the case came on, was forgotten by public and professionals in the really interesting development which the great action took.

For behold the Defendant's counsel had advanced on a most unexpected line, coming in flank upon John K.'s attack and disturbing it horribly. They granted—while they vigorously denied—the technical plea of impersonation—it was nothing of the sort, but no matter. They based the defence on the Statute cited as *Fraudeurs et Tireurs*, vulgarly and humorously known as "Frauds and Terrors," of the 13th of Ed. III., Cap. 2, where it is laid down that if a merchant use the name of another, even by error, and under such obtain a delivery of cheptal, he is at the mercy of the King, *saving in Market of Free Cloison* (that is the point) and (of course) "excepting precincts."

Mr. Justice Honeybubble's judgment will long be quoted as a model. It was lengthy—that was inevitable under the circumstances—but it was conclusive.

Free Cloison being proved, the exception of Precincts (a technical term) did not lie.

The Press vigorously applauded the common sense and justice of the decision.

A writer hired to write in the *Howl* said it was bluff English stuff. Another writer, hired to write on the *Times*, said it bore witness to that sense of reality and impatience with technicalities, peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon race.

Anyhow, judgment for the defendants, and John Koskiusko beaten on points.

Against this judgment the Plaintiff appealed, and *Petre v. Blagden* was taken to the Court of Appeal upon the two points, (*a*) that the original *negoce* was not that of *Merchaunts Libres* nor of *New Livery*, (*b*) that the transit was not of Goods in Marque but of Instrument sole.

The Lords Justices of the Court of Appeal reversed the judgment of the lower Court (Mr. Justice Cubber dissenting). They pointed out that the acts complained of were obviously not done in *Free Cloison*, and admitted "*Merchaunts Libres*." But they left *Livery* open, as being free to either party regardant.

The Press vigorously applauded the common sense and justice of this judgment.

The most ignorant layman can grasp the effect of this last point upon the issues involved. It meant, in practice, that Mr. John K. Petre had Record of Relief *Non Obstante;* that is, he had the technical decision in his favour. But he could not recover what the old Law called (before the Consolidating Act of 22 Vic. 15) "Damnification Personal"; in plain English, he could not proceed to enforce Seizin Virtual and in Plein; or, as Mr. John K. Petre's solicitor explained to him in the simplest possible terms, he could not get any money

John Kosciusko protesting against the interference of Peers in Judicial Procedure.

out of Mr. Blagden, and he was left, of course, to bear the costs of the action.

The anger of John Kosciusko on hearing this upshot of the affair was terrible to witness.

He used the most extravagant language against the Majestic Fabric of British Jurisprudence, and passed all bounds in his abuse of our Courts and Magistrates. He seemed quite to forget that he was our guest, and sorely tried the patience of his legal adviser, Mr. Jacob King, devoted though he was to the financier's service.

"See here," the Rotor King—I mean Baron—began, when the first paroxysm of his indignation had subsided, "hev I got to gi' back home to Summit with nothing out of that skunk, and all this fall wasted? Is that what you call progress? How d'ye *do* it? If it wasn't for the principle of the thing, I'd never want to hear the name of your town again! I'd get quit of this place for good. Why! sir! There's not a coon court on our continent that couldn't give a plain verdict on a thing like that! Why ain't the fellow jailed? But I'm coming back! Don't you think you're rid of me; no! There's some way round it, and I'll take it till I burst him! I'll send a man here and start a paper. I'll track his holdings and wreck 'em. I'll . . . "

Mr. Jacob King dammed the torrent with

the remark that there was still the House of Lords.

"Still the what?" said the angry man of millions.

"The House of Lords," said Mr. Jacob King again, "appeal to the House of Lords."

That excellent and straightforward millionaire wondered if he had heard aright.

"What in Hell hez any durn Lord to do with it?"

Mr. Jacob King explained the technicality. How the words "House of Lords" in this connection meant no more than the supreme and last Court of Appeal composed of Judges and presided over by the Lord Chancellor of the day. He was free to add that it was a great monument to the political genius of the English people that they had preserved . . . etc., etc. But his employer cut him short.

"Well, then, that 's more time and more money?"

"More time, certainly, yes," said Mr. Jacob King thoughtfully. "You may say a year, or the best part of a year."

"What!" shouted John K. Petre. "'Fore they *begin?* 'Fore those wind-artists *begin?*"

"Yes; usually. You see, it 's the rule that everything has to be printed, and then . . ."

"Well, I 'm not going to wait a year," exploded the old gentleman. "I 'll do something desperate! I 'll start one of these campaigns that 'll make the

Ermyntrude, First (and Last) Viscountess Boole: Lord Chancellor of England.

whole darn herd feel like an old Caroliny note, kep' for a curio, 'en framed."

"There are ways," mused Mr. Jacob King aloud, "by which even this can be expedited; only, of course, when urgent public necessity demands it."

"Well, you 've got to find that urgent public necessity," said his paymaster, without urbanity, indeed roughly. "That 's what you 've got to do. Else I won't go down that road anyway. I 'll raise the hell I was telling you of."

Mr. Jacob King hinted that this would be an extra expense. John Kosciusko grumbled. If only they 'd told him, he complained. And a man never knew. They just tied him up tight round the eyes and emptied his pockets. Hadn't he been told in the first hearing, when he allowed that 8,000 dollars to go out for the briefs, that there would be things called consultations? And then there was the tomfoolery of the Five Full Hours and a piece of smarty work called "refreshers," and the good Lord knew what and all. And then there was the Appeal, and all that monkey business over again. And no end to it. And what was the use, anyway?

But he made this proposition. If they could get it through in the next term—Session, was it?—he was sick of these fool words—he 'd stay on and they could just bleed him; but—his word!—if

they were going to dawdle he'd be off and make Hell smoke! Mr. King pleaded for a lump sum to turn round with and do the necessary work. After a good deal of protest he got it; and having got it, he set to work to pull all possible strings—and he did the trick.

There was precedent; there was the Art O'Brien case. It wasn't on all fours, to be sure; but the Authorities were given to understand that it would please what are called "Our Cousins," and the Authorities are always eager where "Our Cousins" are concerned.

And who are the Authorities, you ask? It is a secret of State. None may see those awful Beings in the flesh. Let it suffice the humble reader to be told that we can only know them, like God, by their effects, and that it is our duty to trust them with the faith of a little child—as they used to sing at the Follies in better days than these. So the Authorities worked the machinery, and the Appeal came on in the House of Lords.

Never was the Political direction of a great action more delicate to adjust. On the one hand everything should always be done (as every Patriot agrees) to soothe, not to say dandle, our powerful American Cousins and Hands across the Sea. Yes. On the other hand what on earth would happen to the

Majestic Fabric of Public Life if anyone even remotely connected with such a world as the Trefusis world were to get a knock from the Lawyers? Upon the whole, upon balance, it lay slightly in favour of the Majestic Fabric of Public Life and a shade of odds against Hands across the Sea. But it was a close thing.

It was an open-mouthed marvel to John K. Petre. The Counsel in full-bottomed wigs; the five old gentlemen, one of them bald; Lady Boole sitting on the Woolsack, a squat alert little woman with grinning eyes, and queer little fin-like movements of the hands which she finally clasped and held still; the awful majesty of that Chamber with its leather, its commercial oak, and its metal fittings, all giving the alien Plaintiff an impression of incalculable age. He tried to size it up, and failed.

He was moved to reverence for a moment; but very soon to exasperation, as the heads hidden from him by the full-bottomed wigs drawled on hour after hour, and one or another of the five old gentlemen, but particularly the bald one, would jerk in a fusillade of questions, using words of another world. Then (what was really intolerable!) they would laugh at some jest of theirs, and the Bar would discreetly join. It was interminable.

In the midst of it a tall, sad young man lounged in

and sat far away in a dark corner. John K. Petre wondered what secret ritual that might mean; but the tall sad young man found it boring, and lounged out again. He had but exercised one of those privileges for which his father, the glue manufacturer, had paid half a million after the fibre scandal; and he had never yet got his father's money's worth out of the place.

The hours, the days, went by, and judgment was delivered.

Lady Boole went to the Woolsack and in a beautifully distinct, silvery articulation spoke, for some hours, words meaningless to mortal man. But it was one of the great judgments of our time, and has been the basis of the law ever since. There was a rustle, and a movement, and the beginnings of a departure.

Mr. John K. Petre, his gaunt powerful figure striding vigorously, for all its age, by the side of Jacob King, was thundering down to the central hall. He didn't understand what had happened.

"Well," sighed the solicitor, in an unpleasant tone of content, "so that 's that."

"Which way did it go?" said John K. Petre.

"Oh," answered Jacob King, shaking his head very slightly and slowly, "the original judgment was sustained."

"What d'ye mean?" snapped John K. Petre, stopping short.

"Why, we 've lost," said Jacob King simply.

Then it was that John Kosciusko gave tongue to the eternal heavens, and the central hall rang with such imprecations as startled the crowd of boobies waiting for their M.P.'s and moved three stalwarts of Division A to approach with leisured but determined majesty. The protestor was hustled out, under the stony reproaches of dead Statesmen, of the Thistle, the Rose, and even the Shamrock. Down past Pitt and the rest of them, off through the end of Westminster Hall, and into his motor and through the winter dark throughout, still shouting vengeance.

But it was all over, and there was nothing left to do but the paying.

* * * * *

The Times had a leader next day upon the interest, the significance, and the indubitable soundness of the decision. John K. Petre was already in Paris, and on his way to the warmer ports of the South, and so by an Italian boat to his home. All thought of our Island was doubly abhorrent to him now and for ever.

As for Mr. Blagden, he had paid and paid and paid, without the least regret, delay or protest; and now

that all was over, he sat with Buffy Thompson in the dear library at Harrington settling his plans.

"I 've made up my mind, Buffy," he said. "I thought I could have stayed here till the end of my life. But it needs a poorer man to do that."

"What 're you going to do?" said his friend.

"The first thing I 'm going to do," said Peter Blagden, "is to run down to Southampton and buy a boat well found. I won't wait. I 've had enough. Then I 'm going off cruising. Will you come with me?"

"Yes, if you like," said Buffy.

"We 'll pick up a house somewhere. I favour the Sicilian Coast. We were there reading, you remember, in our fourth year with Turtle of Kings'. And I 'll consider where to bank those cursed bonds abroad."

"You must divide them," said Buffy.

"I don't know. Yes, I suppose so. I 'll wait. There 'll have to be someone to collect. I 'm going to work out the easiest way of doing it. I want it automatic. I want peace."

"But you 'll come back here," said Buffy, "won't you?"

"Yes," said Peter Blagden, with a terrible regret in his eyes. "I couldn't live without that. Yes, I shall come without warning and go without warning.

You see what money does to a man, Buffy," he went on bitterly. "I used to wonder why they all seemed to carry on like secretive, suspicious madmen. But I know now. I shall have to organise peace. You 'll help me, won't you?"

"Certainly," said Buffy. "I 've nothing else to do."

Buffy Thompson had done nothing all his life, and was therefore a very happy man.

"I shall have to do something with that money, Buffy. I shall tie up something for that miserable young idiot my cousin Albert's son. Thank God, he 's a minor; but it 's his right to come into the place when I 'm dead; and after all, he has the name. But it shall only be enough to keep it up properly and give him a decent income. A few thousands too much, and they 'd be pulling the old walls about, and playing the goat with the village. Good God! Buffy, they might put up new lodges, like the horrors at Ballingham, the other side of Patcham, since the whisky man bought it: the things we called 'Little Versailles,'" and he shuddered. "I shall endow you, Buffy."

"I shall be very pleased," said Buffy.

"It 'd be only fair; and you 're not only my oldest friend, you 're my only one, nowadays. And, you know, I 'll keep those rooms in St. James's Place.

They feel part of me; and I 'll buy the house, if they 'll sell it. You 'd take the rooms below mine, wouldn't you?"

"There 's nothing against it," said Buffy.

"Now," said Peter Blagden, suddenly rising and walking up and down the room with his hands clasped behind his back and his head bent, "what 's to be done with the bulk of it? I 've never yet heard of anything being done with a lump like that that didn't bring disaster to all concerned. How can one give big money and not give a curse with it? I must think it out."

* * * * *

And next day in Southampton, looking over one advertised boat and another, he would suddenly break in with that sentence which became a refrain of his: "I must think it out."

And during the weeks of their cruise, on into the Mediterranean spring, in one passage of talk after another, the phrase would crop up. It had become his habit; if he had had a larger circle would have become a jest: "I must think it out . . . I must think it out."

But he is still thinking.

J.W. ARROWSMITH
BRISTOL

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